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ABSTRACT

This theme issue focuses on techniques for effectively parenting gifted students. In "Parenting the Middle School Gifted Child," Sharon Freitas provides suggestions for communicating with adolescents and understanding their needs as they strive for increasing independence. "In Search of the Owner's Manual" (Terrie Gray) documents the search for a child-rearing formula. "An Adolescent Already! Understanding and Meeting the Needs of Your Developing Gifted Child" (Richard Swart) reviews the development of gifted children and describes how these developmental differences often account for school problems, difficulties in family relationships, and emotional problems. "Gifted Kids Don't Come with a Set of Instructions" (Fran Westbrook) discusses the gifted label, the need for permission to fail, the need for a stimulating home environment, teaching responsibility, underachievement, and advocacy. "Self-Concept and the Gifted Child: Executive Summary" (Robert D. Hoge and Joseph S. Renzulli) addresses differences between gifted and average children in their self-concepts, effects on self-concept of labeling a child, and impact on self-concept of placing the child in a separate enriched or accelerated classroom. Other articles include: "How To Build Achievers" (Laura Hathaway); "A Mother's Joy, A Teacher's Reward" (Margaret Gosfield); "Musing on Parental Modeling" (Martha Flournoy); "Advocacy Notes" (Martha Flourncy); "Homeschool: Where Present and Future Meet" (Isabelle Nidever); "Resources for Parents: A GATE Reading List" (Jo Anne Viserta-Galinis); and "Mentoring: It's Not Just for Our Children!" (Sue Benzinger). (Most papers contain references.) (JDD)

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COMMUNICATOR

PARENTING THE GIFTED

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Parenting the Middle School Gifted Child

by Sharon Freitas

When we think of the middle school student, what comes to mind? What goals do we have for them? What are some of their problems and needs? What are some of the things that cause problems between the parent and the child during this very crucial time?

I've found that adolescence may be hard on the parent, but it's even harder on the adolescent. We need to remember that here is a student who really is striving to be independent, and that probably most of the problems arise from that.

The students are experimenting, they're testing, they're trying to define their relationships both within the family and with their peers. They're really torn between being a child in the family and being an independent person on their own. They're coming to the point where they're narrowing and deepening their interests, exploring career goals, and developing specific and sometimes intense interests.

They say they want to take five periods of music and you say, "Now, I really think you ought to think about science and math." They're wondering who they are, what they believe, where they belong. They're going through, of course, their biological maturation, they have very uncertain ideas of what adults and peers expect of them, and they have lost the intimacy that they had with their parents in elementary school. It begins when they say, "Mom, I really don't want you to come to 6th grade anymore or come by my classroom. Do you have to be room mother again?" And if you dare set foot in

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In Search of the Owner's Manual

by Terrie Gray

Which parent hasn't wished that each child emerged from the womb clutching an owner's manual! If only we had the perfect guidelines tailored to the idiosyncratic needs of the child. Since the evolutionary process hasn't carried us to this level, we parents must rely on advice from friends, relatives, educators, talk shows and authors. Our task becomes one of sorting through the myriad child-rearing formulas to find the pattern most agreeable to us and our child. The rest of this article documents my search and describes what I feel to be a suitable formula for working with gifted children.

I do not begin at the beginning, but somewhere in the middle, certainly after the child has already demonstrated precocity, or has been identified gifted. I will call this the "Well, now what?" stage. Conventional wisdom would have it that parents of the gifted have it easy; they can almost do nothing and be assured of a successful outcome. So much for conventional wisdom. In his studies of prodigies, Dr. David Feldman asserts, "The more powerful and specific the gift, the more the need for active, sustained, specific intervention from those who are responsible for the child's development." (*Nature's Gambit*, p. 123)

Dr. Feldman describes a woman he met at a party, who, upon learning of his field of study, told him of her childhood. She was born to profoundly religious parents who tolerated her interest in the piano only when it seemed a casual thing. Once her interest grew, they prevented her from practicing; in fact, they shut her

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EDITOR'S COLUMN

Jean Drum

A Little Respect, if You Don't Mind

This issue is filled with articles by adults who are telling other adults how to be good parents to gifted children. These adults are articulate, concerned, educated and filled with good intentions. But when everything is taken into consideration, they are still adults who are deciding from the heights of years and experience (and perhaps a bit of world weariness) what gifted children need to find in their parents. Just to add a different perspective, let's find out what some gifted kids themselves said they would want if they could choose the perfect parents.

These are elementary school kids, and of course they had some of the usual concerns of children—not have to go to bed so early and not let my little brother mess up my stuff—but they also had some very interesting things to say about themselves as GATE students. First, they wanted to be "treated like regular kids" and they didn't want anyone to "make a big deal about being in GATE." At the same time they appreciated the fact that their parents considered school important and both insisted that they do their homework and were willing to help them with it ("but mostly they let me do it myself.") They wanted to be taken to the library often and allowed to get as many books as they wanted. They wanted rules, and they didn't mind parents being strict as long as they were fair. But overwhelmingly they wanted to be taken seriously. They wanted their parents to listen to their ideas even though they didn't expect parents to let them run the family. They wanted parents to give them credit for knowing things and they wanted to be trusted (though they freely admitted that trust must be earned.) They wanted their parents to listen to them and treat them like "real people." They said it would make them feel good if their parents occasionally asked them for advice. They want to be respected.

Much of the advice given by the adults in this issue touches in one way or another on this question of respect, so it seems that our experts and our children are actually on the same wave length. Earning respect and getting it is a pretty good idea for everyone. And parents, take heart. The children in this survey were almost as one voice in saying that they thought their parents were great. They said they were fair, did fun things with them, comforted them and listened to them, and they want their parents to stay just the way they are.

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CALENDAR

June 28-July 1 and August 2-5, 1993
National Women's History Project
A Woman's Place is ... in the Curriculum
Training session for educators, with credit available.
Rohnert Park, $350 per session.
For information call 707/838-6000

July 19-30, 1993
Confratute '93, Summer program on enrichment learning
University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut
For information call 203/486-4905

July 29-31, 1993
Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted (SENG) Conference
Parents and Professionals as Partners
Knickerbocker Hotel, Chicago, Illinois
For information call 513/873-4300

August 2-6, 1993
Rimm Underachievement Institute
How to Help Bright Underachieving Children
Milwaukee Marriott, Brookfield, Wisconsin
For information call 800/475-1118

August 8-12, 1993
10th World Congress on Gifted and Talented Education
A Gifted Globe
Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Canada
For information call 416/978-2400

November 3-7, 1993
40th Annual Convention of the National Association for Gifted Children
Atlanta, GA
For information call 202/785-4268

March 4-6, 1994
32nd Annual CAG Conference
Oasis for Cultural Diversity
Palm Springs Convention Center and Wyndham Hotel
For information call 818/888-8846

NEWS BREIFS

Youth Summit

In conjunction with the World Congress on Gifted Education in Toronto in August, a Youth Summit will be convened. Two hundred young people from around the world are expected to attend. Daily sessions with facilitators will provide opportunities for sharing thoughts, feelings and writings, individually and in small groups.

The theme, "Gifted Youth Think About Education Worldwide," will give the delegates a focus for their discussions. They will also attend lectures and workshops by people such as actor and Ambassador at Large for UNICEF, Sir Peter Ustinov; Nobel Prize winning chemist, John Polanyl; and Secretary General of the Rio Earth Summit, Maurice Strong.

Students must be between 15 and 19. Housing will be on the campus of the University of Toronto. Registration fee is C$525 which includes five nights lodging, two meals per day, five-day bus transit pass, ticket to a Blue Jays baseball game, all sessions and social activities from Sunday afternoon, August 8 to Friday morning, August 13.

If you are interested in representing California, contact Dr. Barbara Clark at 818/716-6762.

Dr. Norman Mirman to be Honored

The West Coast Father's Day Council has selected Norman Mirman, Co-Founder and Director of the Mirman School as one of the fathers to be honored in this year's event at the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles on June 8. With his personal and professional partner, Beverly Marmour Mirman, he raised daughter Leslie and son Alan. They are the proud grandparents of five and still at the helm of the Mirman School which they established to meet the needs of gifted students in 1963.

CAG congratulates Dr. Mirman!

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Sandra Kaplan

From Both Sides Now

by Sandy Kaplan, President
and Bette Gould, parent of gifted children

I am pleased to share this space with a colleague who taught with me many years ago, and who has shared the growing up of her gifted children with me. Following are excerpts from a recent discussion we had regarding parenting the gifted.

Lack of Challenge

Parent: One of my biggest concerns is whether the schools consistently are providing challenging situations for my children. While on the one hand I want to support the need for more challenging experiences for gifted children, I feel ambivalent about asking a teacher to provide one more thing when I consider the huge task of educating all children in the class. Nonetheless, I am my children's advocate and must find a way to articulate my concerns.

Educator: Schools are not always clear in being able to describe to parents exactly what challenges they are providing. Sometimes this is due to a lack of consistent and cohesive philosophy for a gifted program; other times it is a failure to communicate the elements of a challenging program that is in existence. Often, end products are shared with parents, but the means for achieving those products are not described and, therefore, the challenging process that the child experienced while developing the product remains unclear.

Parent: What is the best way for me to question a teacher about available challenges for gifted children? I'd like to do it in a way that encourages a partnership and not in a way that would offend or put off the teacher.

Educator: One good way is for a parent to state some of her own observations of her child, and to invite the teacher's perceptions related to her observations. This provides a way by which the teacher and parent can communicate about the child without intimidation. There are general topics or areas that both parents and teachers should agree are the common ground for discussion. Some of these are: "What progress do you see?" "What areas or activities in the classroom truly engage or stimulate the child?" "How can the school and the home build a partnership to enhance the child's exposure to challenging experiences?"

Parental Responsibility

Parent: I'm always concerned that I'm not doing enough to enhance my child's ability. And, then sometimes, I'm concerned that I'm overly involved with what's going on in my child's education. How do I walk this tightrope?

Educator: There is no clear-cut answer to that question. But there are some benchmarks that we can use to address the issue. One is that we need to pay more attention to the signals that children give us in the dialogs that we have with them, in the activities they adopt for leisure time, and to their attitudes about themselves as learners. Parents need to remember that the answer to the question is found in the understanding of their individual child as well as in the ability to understand their own needs versus the needs they feel for their child.

Differences Among the Gifted

Parent: Why are my two gifted children so different from each other? One of my children is very self-motivated and has a desire to be accomplished in every endeavor, but creates some stress for herself. The other one is disorganized, has only some self-motivation, and generally takes the easy route to most goals—but he's very happy.

Educator: Perhaps one of the most startling observations in looking at a group of gifted students is to recognize that there is as much heterogeneity in this group as there is diversity among any group of children. The standard concept that every child must be looked at as a unique individual rather than be compared to others is true for the gifted. The contemporary concept that giftedness is represented by multiple and varied areas of expertise and ability must be applied within families as well as within schools.

How to Build Achievers

by Laura Hathaway

Gifted underachievers present a complex challenge to their teachers, as well as their parents. How sad to see a student with great potential, even tremendous verbal or mathematical ability, who is unable to follow through on assignments or to perform up to expectations.

I wrestled with this problem during many years of working with gifted youngsters and their families until I came across the work of Dr. Sylvia Rimm, who was able to put the issue into perspective for me. I have found her viewpoint extremely helpful in coping with underachievers and helping them to be more successful.

Dr. Rimm sees underachievement starting from a home situation in which the child plays a *dependent* or *dominant* role. The *dependent* child is overprotected and immature, one who seeks constant approval and guidance. He/she actually can appear stressed or anxious from too much parental pressure, when in reality the stress results from inability to handle effort. The *dominant* child is one who has too much attention from his/her parents, one who has become the center of power in the family. This child has been encouraged to challenge authority and has never received clear messages regarding limits or appropriate behavior.

Achievers are people who have learned persistence, how to be problem-solvers, how to survive winning and losing, and how to put forth effort towards a goal. Underachievers, on the other hand, have a hard time with the discipline and effort necessary to be successful. They are poor risk-takers who tend to seek constant attention and blame others for lack of success.

School can also affect underachievement. If the structure of the classroom is too loose or too rigid, underachievers will tend to challenge the system. They perform better when expectations are clear, but there is some flexibility for differences. Competition can also affect their performance, since they have a difficult time comparing themselves to others. If they are able to compete against their own performance, they can often be more successful.

Interestingly enough, those children who are dependent and seem to be suffering under the burden of parental pressure often do better when they are given *less* sympathetic support from the teacher, rather than more. Since they seek constant attention, it is helpful to encourage them to try to work on their own and seek help less often. They need to develop more independent working skills and experience the satisfaction of solving problems on their own.

Achievers are people who have learned persistence, how to be problem-solvers, how to survive winning and losing, and how to put forth effort towards a goal.

We know that teacher expectations can affect students' performance as well. That is especially true in the case of underachievers. Constant correction or reprimands in front of other children can have a very negative effect.

We also know that the word "bored" can have many meanings. This is a word that is often used by dominant children and their parents to suggest that schoolwork is too easy or inappropriate, when in reality the work may involve too much effort. We need to help parents understand that building academic skills is similar to honing physical or musical skills. No one would want to suggest that a budding figure skater stop practicing "school figures," or the star basketball player stop practicing, even though they also need an outlet for their special talents. In the same way, even very gifted children need to learn the basic skills that are the foundation to future learning at higher levels.

Standards of acceptable work and behavior are also important. No matter how creative a story is, it is still important that words and grammar are used correctly. No matter how valuable, intelligent and interesting a student's contribution is, people on the receiving end of the contribution still appreciate being treated with courtesy and respect.

It would take much more than the space we have available to describe the ways we need to work with gifted underachievers to promote achievement. In fact, I strongly suggest that you read Dr. Rimm's books *Underachievement Syndrome: Causes and Cures* and *How to Parent So Children Will Learn*. These are available through Educational Assessment Service, Inc., W6050 Apple Road, Watertown, WI 53094.

The major point, however, is clear. We as parents and teachers need to help our youngsters understand the value of effort in academic success, and that to be achievers, students must be willing to work hard, to sometimes struggle and persevere and to problem-solve and hone their talents. Just as in sports or the arts, creativity or talent without discipline is not productive.

Without parent involvement and support on this issue we have little chance of success, especially with older students. If we as educators can work together with parents to develop these work habits and attitudes, then I believe we have a good chance of turning underachievement around.

Laura Hathaway is the Director of the Pegasus School, 19692 Lexington Avenue, Huntington Beach, CA 92646.

An Adolescent Already! Understanding and Meeting the Needs of Your Developing Gifted Child

by Richard Swart

Raising a child in today's Post-Modern society is a challenge for any parent. Raising a psychologically well adjusted and achieving teenager almost seems to require a Ph.D. in child psychology, if you listen to the avalanche of articles on parenting and child development. Unfortunately, the effect of this mass of information is often to leave parents of gifted children more confused. Gifted kids just don't fit into the neat descriptions offered in most "how-to" parenting manuals.

Few parents or teachers have adequate information regarding the very unusual developmental course taken by gifted kids. Many are tricked into thinking that giftedness means accelerated development. Not true! Gifted children develop in *qualitatively* different ways compared with their age mates. One specific difference is in the meaning of adolescence. Gifted children can be adolescent long before their bodies develop sexually. This article will review the development of gifted children and describe how these developmental differences often account for school problems, difficulties in family relationships and emotional problems. Ideas and suggestions for parenting and communication strategies will also be reviewed.

The Early Years

While the professional literature continues to debate whether giftedness is a genetic variable or is created in the cauldron of family and school interactions, any group of gifted parents will agree that they knew something was "different" or "unusual" about their children in infancy or preschool. The parents aren't the only ones. Research with young gifted children shows that they are aware of a difference between themselves and other children at between two and two-and-a-half years. These differences often become evident as the child's facility with language far surpasses her peers. Gifted children also are known for their extremely inquisitive minds. They learn for learning's sake and never appear satisfied. The nature of their questions, as well as the intensity of their thought processes, often differentiate gifted children from their peers in pre-school.

Richard Swart, MSW, is the Gifted and Talented Specialist at Spectrum Comprehensive Mental Health Care Medical Group. His address is 2147 Mowry Avenue, Suite D-1, Fremont, CA 94538

A common myth affecting many parents is that gifted children should not be told they are gifted because it will harm them psychologically. This is based on a belief that being gifted will put the child under too much pressure or will cause him to become arrogant or egotistical. The number one complaint of gifted children found by Judy Galbraith in her research for *The Gifted Kids Survival Guide* was that "no one explains what being gifted is all about; it is kept a big secret."

A fundamental task of parenting is to provide a context for the child to understand herself and develop an appreciation of her abilities and talents. Until age eight children don't have a clearly defined sense of self separate from that of their families. Until age seven or eight most children can't really understand objective feedback about their abilities: report cards, scores and IQ numbers are understood only in connection with the parents' reactions and the child's meaning system about what "good boys" or "good girls" are supposed to do. Adult discomfort with the term "gifted" often prevents parents from providing their children with an opportunity to talk about being gifted. Many times this lack of communication is also a result of parents' denial of, or discomfort with, their own giftedness. This is especially true of mothers who are bound by cultural expectations that preclude self acceptance as a gifted individual in order to be accepted as feminine.

Being gifted is not something that occurs three hours a week in the GATE class. Being gifted affects a person's entire psychological, emotional, sexual, and intellectual development from the moment of birth onward. Not talking about how a person experiences the world is tantamount to rejecting that person's experience in life. Parents need to talk with their family about giftedness, what it is going to mean to the family, and how they wish family members to interact with the gifted child. Discussing giftedness as a type of talent often decreases sibling conflict when everyone's talents in the family are noticed and given time. Ensuring that the extended family gives your

gifted child attention and nurturance for personality not performance helps to prevent the development of perfectionism. Many gifted children are put on display by their families. This quickly leads to young gifted children becoming attention addicts and sets the stage for identity crises later in development. A fundamental task of adolescence is the development of a sense of self that is uniquely valued outside of a parent's expectations.

Developmental Differences

A brief review of some of the developmental differences in gifted children will help to set the stage for understanding their challenges in adolescence.

Intensity of Emotions and Reactions. Gifted children experience the world deeply. They become engaged with people, play, ideas and fantasies in ways that are often unappreciated by others. We are all aware of the emotional conflict that many great performers and artists endure. What most don't understand is that the same intensity, passion and volatility can accompany any project that is engaging. The difference is that in the arts there is a culture that supports self-expression and which allows for the development of intimate and revealing relationships. Young children and gifted children whose passions do not get supported in organized ways often feel disturbed or strange because others don't understand their emotional attachments. Additionally, gifted children react more strongly to almost all stimuli. Mood swings, silliness, absorption in computers or Nintendo, extremely fussy eating and intense grief reactions to small losses are all examples of this intensity. This often is mistakenly diagnosed as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Gifted children and adults need assistance in learning to express their feelings and find a supportive community that allows this difference.

Parents are often tricked by their children's extensive vocabularies or arguing capacity into believing that the child possesses advanced emotional development. Gifted children are children first and need to be parented at their level of emotional development, not at the level of their vocabulary. Time-outs, hugs, cookies and playing in the park are oftentimes necessary interventions before problem solving can begin. Gifted children who do not yet know how to express their feeling may come to you with a "101 reasons why I hate my teacher" lecture since they don't know how to say, "I had a bad day at school. I'm embarrassed and hurt because I got a bad grade." Children will use their strongest skills under stress. This often means that gifted children use their analytic thinking skills and language skills to try to cope with emotions that they don't understand and which are often years ahead of their chronological development.

Supersensitivity and Extraperceptiveness. Gifted children's ability to acquire information is sometimes more of a problem than a benefit when it comes to non-academic issues. Some parents believe that gifted children have bat-like hearing because of their ability to know everything that is being talked about at home or at school. These children are able to acquire masses of information. This information is often years ahead of their readiness to deal with it physically or emotionally. These kids become aware of major problems facing the world and feel powerless to deal with them. These children often initiate learning about subjects that we would prefer they not yet know about. If we limit their ability to ask questions about difficult issues, they do not stop questioning, they stop communicating. This struggle to reconcile the world of childhood to the reality of the world as it truly is (and we adults may be afraid to admit how bad it can be) can lead to an existential crisis in a young child.

Questioning of values, questioning of tradition, and cynicism and contempt for adult institutions is often blamed on peer pressure and hormones. However, these behaviors are indicative of young people trying to make as much sense of their existence in the world as their life experience allows. This sensitivity, when coupled with advanced reasoning abilities, lays the groundwork for adolescent identity struggles in childhood. The psychological birth of an adolescent is not marked by the changes of puberty, but by the psychological necessity to create a self image and understanding of the world in which personal integrity can be maintained and which allows separation from those aspects of society that threaten a person's sense of personal agency. Many gifted children prefer the company and conversation of teenagers or adults, question adult values and assert their will, struggle with self-esteem and identity concerns, are confused and overwhelmed by expectations and career decision making, reason abstractly, and are struggling to find a peer group to support their independence. These children are often eight or nine or ten years old. Giftedness forces us to realize

that children may undergo, in becoming adolescents, what Josselson calls "cataclysmic ego changes that hardly make a sound."

Identity, Self-Evaluation and School Achievement. One of the least understood aspects of becoming an adolescent involves how they understand the reasons for their successes and lack of successes. If you ask the average eight or nine-year-old child what they want to become when they grow up, you are likely to get wonderful ideas like "NFL quarterback," "astronaut," "doctor, judge, and cowboy all at the same time." We label these aspirations dreams or fantasies, since we as adults understand the inherent difficulty in achieving these goals. If you ask the same child why another outperformed him or her, you are not likely to hear "because they're faster/smarter/more coordinated/etc. than me." You are more likely to get an answer that does not involve an explicit comparison and which discounts bad performance on the child's part to good luck for the other child, or "it's Thursday," or "the teacher likes him better," or "I dunno." The dawn of the realization that we all have finite ceilings of capacity and the ability to differentiate luck from skill emerges in most children at twelve or thirteen years of age. Since the variation in sexual development is extreme, this figure in reality represents the dawn of formal operational thinking and abstract thinking in average children. Gifted children, however, often achieve this realization years before their peers. When the average twelve-year-old stops wanting to play soccer, we often understand the request as being caused by peer pressure. We sometimes forget that peer pressure to conform has been a strong component of childhood development since early childhood. This behavior of wanting to quit activities that involve evaluation is primarily based on fear of failure. Before, bad performances did not reflect on the child's adult ego. Now a failure makes the child feel that "all the world's a stage and the spotlight is on me!" Teachers of gifted children report significant problems with underachievement starting at about third or fourth grade. The reason for this is likely that this is the time frame in which gifted children begin the struggle to control their image (or, in fancier terms, have control of ego integrity). The so-called self-esteem problems faced by middle school students are also an artifact of this cognitive shift that is poorly understood. Most self-esteem inventories are based on comparison to peers and require a feeling of superiority to peers to have a high rating of self-esteem. If children are developing this capacity to understand their limits and become aware of other children who are better than they are, they are then faced with the struggle to develop an integrated sense of self that protects them from feeling inadequate. Many parents report that their younger gifted children compare themselves to older kids and are self-deprecating. This behavior indicates that the children have achieved this stage of advanced reasoning and need to be taught to compare themselves against their own past performances in line with personally meaningful goals. Schools and families that use comparison strategies in an attempt to motivate these children only raise their anxiety about being evaluated.

How Parents and Teachers Can Help

1. Discuss with your students/children your expectations and talk about failure. Many kids have highly exaggerated fears of what you will think or feel if they do not perform at high levels. This fear leads them to not take risks and can lead to decreased performance or self-sabotage as a way of avoiding this fear.
2. Make sure your kids have the necessary study and organizational skills to allow them to be successful. Many younger gifted children succeed in school by using memory and language skills and don't develop organizational or critical thinking skills. Reading study skill guides together with your children may be helpful.
3. Before you praise your child, find out how he feels about his efforts and accomplishments. Sometimes he may be upset about something we don't know happened, and our premature praise is interpreted as not responding to how he feels.
4. When talking to your child, seek to develop her sense of personal agency (or knowledge about her means and abilities.) This is done by asking the child to explain her thinking (how did you figure that out, why did you enjoy it, what would you like to do with what you have discovered, how did you resist giving up when it got frustrating, how did you resist stereotypes, how did you use your abilities.)
5. Be open about your own mistakes and frustrations. Do not give them details that are inappropriate for their place in the family, but model for them the idea of working hard and taking care of yourself. Remem-

ber the "do-do" principle: kids do what we do, not what we tell them to do. Research has clearly shown that the confidence of significant adults in their ability to manage stress and expectations predicts children's abilities to deal with their stressors.

6. Be careful to separate your support for your adolescents from your expectations for them. Research with suicidal adolescents (unfortunately, gifted teenagers comprise 25 to 50% of the patients in adolescent psychiatric hospitals) shows that suicidal adolescents report just as much peer and family support as non-suicidal adolescents. The difference is that they perceive that their support is conditional on performance. They report seeing a discrepancy between the importance of their success to their parents and their own achievement, and they feel powerless to change that discrepancy. In fact, the more suicidal the adolescents were, the higher the conditionality of their emotional support. Until children are 15 or 16, parents remain the primary source of emotional support. Falling into the trap of becoming an enforcer or evaluator can lead to a tragic cycle of emotional distancing and further deterioration in family relationships. No grade or college admission is worth sacrificing the emotional connection with your child. Their school problems may actually be a test to see if you will love them when they don't perform well. The pressure placed on parents by the advertising media and our own narcissistic culture often traps parents into fearing that their child will fail if not controlled or pushed to be their best. Kids are very aware of these feelings and hear them as "My parents don't believe in me or my abilities" and "My parents think I am unmotivated and don't care about my future. If they want to be responsible for my future, then I guess I have an excuse to be irresponsible."
7. Do not be afraid to get counseling support from someone who is thoroughly familiar with the psychological development and needs of gifted children. Most therapists are either ineffective or injurious if they do not know about giftedness. Contacting your school district's GATE program coordinator is a good way to start finding a person who can assist your child or family. The truth is that while adolescent development is challenging, adolescents should not show dramatic mood swings consistently. They should not refuse to communicate with their families, and they should not always seem down or anxious. A problem is a problem if it lasts more than a couple of weeks or is recurrent. These issues are not phases that kids will grow out of, and there is no reason to discount troubled behavior because the person is an adolescent.
8. Lastly, schedule times to talk with your gifted child. Parent outings without friends or siblings are a useful opportunity to keep communication open. It may be difficult, but it is necessary to learn how to communicate with your adolescent gifted child. Many parents of gifted children find that books about talking to teenagers are relevant in elementary school. Make sure that both parents send consistent messages about school and performance expectations in these communications. Gifted children need a united front behind them to support their development of a healthy adult life-style.

The Game

None but us can free our minds
Trapped down by our modern times
Where there are simply just a few
Who would not kill as taught to do
It's bred in life thru what we've seen
Glorified on the silver screen
Taught to us by fear and fate
This overwhelming love to hate.
Our children see this all the time
They learn it quick I think you'll find
With plastic guns I trust they will
Learn to shoot and shoot to kill
As life goes on they see it more
And parents try to lock the door
But like Pandora's box was found
The doors will swing without a sound.
How can the children learn to love
As bullets scream thru air above
The lower that we must duck to hide
The faster our world seems to die
Let's teach our kids not hate but love
And quiet the screaming air above
Cause bullets fly without a name
In this a human killing game.

Shane Pickett, Fountain Valley High School
Janet Barkawi, Teacher

A Mother's Joy, A Teacher's Reward

by Margaret Gosfield

An incident occurred last week which moved me in a special way. I was overseeing an exhibit by our elementary GATE students when a woman came up and greeted me. I didn't recognize her; but when she mentioned her name, I knew that she must be Raymond's mother.

Raymond was a student I worried about long after he left my world geography class for gifted 7th and 8th grade students. His mother's comments stirred memories of those classroom days years ago, and when I returned home I searched through the journals I had kept during my early years of teaching. Finally I found what I was looking for.

March 6, 1976

Yesterday was an extraordinary day in my teaching career. It all started Wednesday when I showed the IALAC filmstrip. Actually, it all started in September when Raymond entered my classroom. Raymond is a 7th grader; he's overweight and wears dark rimmed glasses. He's brusk in manner and speech and is often overbearing. He uses large words which even the brightest kids in the class are not accustomed to hearing. He's an easy target to make fun of.

There have been many conflicts in class throughout the year, and this has created considerable concern for me. Tom and Scott, both eighth graders, seem especially to derive pleasure from tormenting Raymond.

Before the kids came into class on Wednesday, I prepared a number of small IALAC signs which I pinned onto their shirts as they entered. It mystified the students and several minutes were spent in speculating as to what the signs meant.

Then we watched the filmstrip. The letters stand for :"I Am Lovable And Capable" The gist of the story is that everyone carries around an invisible IALAC sign, but every time we experience a put-down from someone, a piece of our sign is torn off. After a while many people begin to build walls of separation to protect themselves from being hurt by the put-downs.

The lesson didn't have much to do with world geography, but it did have a great deal to do with adolescent kids and some of the daily pain they experience at the hands of other kids and sometimes even adults. We discussed the filmstrip, and then I asked the students to try wearing the IALAC sign around school for the rest of the day. Each time they received a put-down, they were to tear off a piece of their sign.

Thursday I asked the kids how things had gone the day before. They responded with comments such as, "Gosh, I never realized before how many put-downs occur in a single day." Their increased sensitivity was very encouraging to me. But I also learned that some kids had gone around making put-downs just so that others would have to tear up their signs. They suggested that we wear two signs—a fresh IALAC sign and also a YALAC sign (You Are Lovable And Capable). Then every time an individual put someone down, he would have to tear off a piece of his own YALAC sign.

On Friday I again asked my students how things had gone the day before. It happened that on that day, I had only 7th graders in the class since the 8th graders were attending a school talent show. A short while into the discussion, Raymond raised his hand and announced that he had had four compliments and 63 put-downs. The class burst out laughing.

This was a shock to me. In my experience, gifted students are generally more sensitive to others' feelings than kids in general. But in this case they found Raymond's statement cause for amusement and for ridicule.

"I wonder why you're laughing," I said. "A classmate has just told us that he had the incredible number of 63 put-downs in one day, and you seem to think it's funny."

At first the students made excuses, explaining to me why they found Raymond unlikable. Gradually I was able to guide them to begin speaking to Raymond directly. And then Raymond was able to face them and even to express some of his feelings. By the middle of the period, kids were commenting, "Gee, I never knew these things about Raymond before," and "Now I understand Raymond's actions better than before." They began to express concern that while they now saw Raymond in a different light, and would make an effort to treat him well, what about the 8th graders? If they tried to talk to them, would the older students just laugh at them? They were particularly concerned about Scott and Tom who tend to dominate classroom interactions and who are Raymond's

chief tormenters.

I don't know what will happen now. I hope I can persuade the counselor to set up a small discussion group to include Joe, Eddie, Raymond and a few others.

That event occurred seventeen years ago. As I recall, things in class did improve, But life was never easy for Raymond. He finished junior high and went on to high school. Later I heard he enrolled at Westmont College. And then one day I saw him back at my school, now as a substitute teacher. My conversation with him in the teachers' lounge at lunch time was brief. Apparently the kids were giving him a bad time, as they love to do to substitutes. More importantly, he reported that he had not been able to find a suitable permanent job. I was glad that he had progressed so far, but I was still uncertain and concerned about his future. And then I saw and heard no more of Raymond...

Until last week, that is, when his mother attended the student exhibit to see the display of a young neighbor child. What she shared with me then touched my heart deeply. She told me that Raymond was now married to a wonderful girl, that he had a good job, and that he was "so happy." She repeated the phrase "so happy" in such a way that I knew she was remembering the mother's pain she had felt when Raymond was hurt by people's attitudes and actions.

For me, the exchange with Raymond's mother brought closure in regard to a student who had remained a big question mark for me. I had carried a concern for him longer than for any other student who had been in my charge. I had no part in his eventual success; but to learn that he finally found his niche in life brought great satisfaction to me. It was a wonderful reward.

Musing on Parental Modeling

by Martha Flournoy

Recently I was on a flight with my mother. My mother is an internationally known musician, working and contributing to the field that is near and dear to her. She was revising her thoughts for an article she was to write for a publication in her field. Her deadline was before mine, since she had already taken pen to paper while I was still contemplating about what I was going to write. It occurred to me that modeling behavior—modeling all kinds of behavior—for our kids is critical. Leadership, social responsibility, kindness, honesty, respect, morality and conflict resolution are just a few of the many important qualities we need to model. But in attempting to be positive models for our children, we forget the other areas for which modeling is critical, such as disappointment, failure and imperfection.

It was many years ago that my mother began giving instrumental instruction to our older daughter and would make the hour trip from her home to ours on a weekly basis. These visits were anticipated by all in our family. Occasionally she would have returned from an international trip and would share her experiences, both positive and negative. Frequently she would tell stories that put her in a far from perfect light. Many of the stories were humorous as well as touching. The humor would stem from her laughing at herself and the situation. Often these incidents involved "mistake behavior" such as getting turned around and going for miles in the wrong direction in an unfamiliar city or forgetting to do something before leaving home. Once she told of becoming locked in a restroom right before she was to perform. Of course the stories always resolved one way or another. The girls looked forward to her "Grandma stories" and would always wonder if this week she had one for them.

I realized that as parents we do not often model these behaviors; in fact we purposely do not mention these events or situations, since they would reflect on us in other than a perfect light. Even the vocabulary surrounding these situations is negative, such as "stupid," "silly," "awkward," or "dumb."

We, as parents, must become more aware of the importance of talking with our children about our failures. Errors in judgment, traffic infractions, accidents, lack of planning or procrastination are all opportunities to model ways to deal with failure and imperfection in healthy, acceptable and responsible ways. We all do this and move on, having learned from these experiences. Modeling "mistake behaviors" and the ability to handle those situations with humor and perspective, is as valuable as modeling all the "perfect" behaviors we want to impart to our children.

Advocacy Notes

by Martha Flournoy

Recently I attended a workshop to increase awareness of parents on the topic of advocacy. Many points were made that I had heard before, but many of these points cannot be heard enough. The power to effect change or keep the status quo is in the hands of parents. We are the individuals who elect our officials and we are the ones whose sole job is to ensure the best education for our children. Educators are viewed by legislators as knowledgeable, but they may also be seen as having other motives, such as job security or interest in promoting certain programs. Parents are seen as working entirely for the good of their children. One of my first experiences in making contact with one of my legislators made that clear. I was there to talk about the GATE program and I was asked if I worked outside the home. I am a teacher, though not in GATE, so I innocently told him that. It was the end of the discussion. He could no longer see me as a parent, but only as a teacher. Of course this is an isolated incident and most legislators have a much higher regard for the teaching profession than this individual, but I did learn a valuable lesson.

A common excuse for not approaching legislators is lack of knowledge or facts. The one indisputable fact is the effect of a program such as GATE on your child. Parents are the "experts" on that. Legislators know what their aides, their consultants, the literature and their own experiences tell them. We as parents need to make them aware of our own experiences to ensure that our children, as well as all children with distinct needs, are served. The following are some tips on visiting your local legislators.

1. Get a group of both male and female parents which represents the ethnicity and economics of your area together for a visit. Four parents at the most is desirable. With a group of four there will be a free flow of conversation and all will feel more comfortable.
2. Make an appointment. Most legislators are in their districts on Fridays.
3. Know the points you want to make.
4. Make it short.
5. Encourage a follow-up to either the legislator or an aide by asking for some information his/her office might have or by volunteering to send him/her pertinent information. Do send a note of appreciation and encourage him/her to be in contact with any questions.

If it is not possible to visit your legislator, letters are an excellent way of making your feelings known. Letters should have a personal reference to your child and how the GATE program has affected him/her. Excellent tips on writing letters are found in the CAG Advocacy Handbook, pages 27-28.

At a local level, it is most important to stay abreast of what is happening. What affects your child most is what is going on in his/her district, school, and classroom. Here are a few tips on keeping informed.

1. Get to know your school's teachers and the principal.
2. Ask questions. Know the responsibilities of teachers, principals, coordinators, administrators and school board members, and be aware of the chain of command.
3. Get to know the district personnel who are involved with GATE.
4. Go to school board meetings. Make your presence known. Be sure to introduce yourself and let them know that GATE is the reason you are there. There should be someone at each board meeting who is looking out for and is interested in GATE. To share this responsibility, a rotation with other parents should be established.
5. Get to know your school board members. Take them one at a time to lunch.

The power is in the hands of the parents if we choose to use it.

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Homeschool: Where Present and Future Meet

by Isabelle Nidever

It's a dream school. Individualized instruction in a responsive learning environment. Integrated curriculum, students traveling at their own pace through material they've selected, small teacher/student ratio. Active involvement in learning, with learning level and style matched to each student. Skiing down tree-covered slopes, horseback riding, chasing newts in a mountain stream, gardening outdoors under the sun, easy computer access, science exploration in a fully equipped laboratory or rock-hopping at the beach, reading as much and as often as you wish and what you wish without fear of a "pop quiz." Music, painting and photography (not just on Friday,) writing, producing and acting in your own plays. Unlimited resources and community involvement. Pondering, asking questions and seeking answers as you desire. Meeting and interacting with people of all ages, from all places. Dancing and singing your way through the day.

Individualized education is the wave of the future. Yet the needs of our children are pressing *now*. How do parents ensure those needs are met? While district officials and groups of parents and teachers debate about what may or may not be appropriate for labeled students (whatever the label), one alternative, both satisfying and successful, is homeschooling. In California, exempt by certificated tutor (CA Ed. Codes 418200 and 48224), enrolled in private school (Ed. Code 48222) or under district supervision in an independent study plan are three permitted alternatives to compulsory school attendance, according to the Los Angeles County Department of Education. Homeschool is actually a misnomer in many cases, since this alternative often uses the wider community as a classroom to promote active involvement in learning. Independent learning is preferred for individuals who have been encouraged to explore and question and rarely to accept the concept of right/wrong answers, and for whom the traditional classroom is confining and restrictive. It has been proven successful, and test scores as a group are higher than those of conventionally schooled peers (Ray & Wartes, 1991). The intimacy of the homeschooling situation affords an opportunity to use what works based upon the need of the moment. Colfax and Colfax (Linehan, 1992) report that "the public school child spends approximately 1,100 hours per year in school, but only 220 hours on task." For an efficient learner, this can be uncomfortable, to say the least.

Highly gifted children are asynchronous developers according to Kearney (1992). Educational decisions must be flexible and responsive in order to accommodate the varying emotional, physical, cognitive and perceptual needs which do not necessarily develop together or in any predictable pattern. Denying the existence of special needs in this group is akin to denying diversity of culture and the needs necessarily inherent in distinctions of any kind, yet few schools address the unique needs of highly gifted students, putting them at risk for frustration and boredom when positive experiences should abound. Nancy Wallace (1983) poignantly describes the transformation of her own son from an avid learner to a defeated student whose self-esteem fell dramatically during his school days, prompting their family's decision to home school. His recovery and subsequent joy in family togetherness is inspiring and *reachable*.

Taking responsibility for learning through choice and control is imperative for growth and well-being (Clark, 1992). Humans are born with a sense of wonder and go forth on the path of discovering what the world is about through exploration, experiment, activity and questioning, just as Plato gathered a group of boys about himself, discussing things of interest to the children, wandering through their world with them. The role of educators is to help individual learners access their world, and there are as many approaches to learning as there are learners. Learning is not best accomplished through coercion, routine, drill and repetition, for it is in variety of environment that most learning is inspired.

Individualization comes by paying attention to individuals, beginning at their level, and travelling where they may lead. Involved parents have an edge here. They have an intimate knowledge of their own child and a vested interest in that child's development. This not only enhances the learning process, but develops self-esteem. The two are intertwined and

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equal emphasis must be placed on each. To capture the intrinsic motivation to learn with which individuals are born necessitates encouraging curiosity, exploration, discovery, experiment, risk-taking and accepting mistakes as a valid part of the learning process. Creating a responsive environment at home and in the community means respecting and trusting individuals to know what is best for themselves at any given time. Respect and trust are symbiotic relationships between individuals, and maintaining family cohesiveness in today's fast-paced and fragmenting social climate requires close attention to relationships.

Home education affords an opportunity for flexibility, spontaneity, student control and real world experiences in learning. According to Ray and Wartes (1991), "The data suggest that home schooling can compete with conventional schooling in terms of the major agendas of education, academic task and the socializing of children. It seems that home education is a valid, viable alternative that should be readily and intelligently presented to the public at large."

References and Further Reading

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Ray, B. & Wartes, J. (1991). The academic achievement and affective development of home-schooled children. In *Home Schooling: Political, Historical, and Pedagogical Perspectives.* J. Van Galen & M. Pittman (eds.), Norwood, NJ: Ablex., pp43-62.

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Untitled

The child with her chubby fingers
Dipped the wand in the bowl.
She made a little "o" with her mouth and
Tried to blow.
Slowly a bubble formed.
The child jumped for joy
with her face all aglow.
Her dimpled smile radiated
Beautifully upon
Her small innocent face as she
Watched that one big bubble being
Blown by the breeze.
It seemed so happy and so free.
She looked closer and saw
That the bubble contained many colors
The colors
Whipped and whirled as in chaos.
As every little waft of air picked it up
Forcing it to go with the flow,
The bubble slowly reached
Higher and higher toward heaven.
It got whiter and whiter and
Soon ceased to be.

The old lady with a dimpled smile
Looked back into her life.
Tears began to form in her loving eyes.
A lone tear
Carefully emerged and fell
Silently onto her soft deathbed pillow.
Tear after tear followed after.
She slowly seemed to reach
Higher and higher toward heaven.
She got whiter and whiter and
Soon ceased to be.

Joan Le
Fountain Valley High School
Janet Barkawi, Teacher

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Resources for Parents: A GATE Reading List

Compiled by Jo Anne Viserta-Galinis

"I don't have the time to read about it, just give me the main ideas." That seems to be the cry from more parents—not enough time to read about the area of gifted and talented, but desperate for the facts.

And too often, if they do find a few minutes, they manage to pick up a book that is "clinical" or, in the words of some, "a classic textbook." No wonder parents are frustrated when it comes to trying to understand the area of gifted and talented.

So, what is a parent to do? Well, you can go to conferences, workshops and seminars, but the easiest method of discovery is still finding that all-important book. To make your search a little easier, the following list is offered in the area of beginning readings on the subject of gifted and talented.

Adderholdt-Elliott, Miriam. (1987). *Perfectionism: What's Bad About Being Too Good?* Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Co. (Discusses perfectionism syndrome—a must for everyone!)

Alvino, James, et al (1985) *Parents' Guide to Raising a Gifted Child.* Boston: Little, Brown, and Co. (Includes wide variety of topics and information.)

Baskin, B. & Harris, K. (1980) *Books for Gifted Children.* New York: R.R. Bowker Co. (Listing of books for gifted children to read.)

Delisle, James R. (1984) *Gifted Children Speak Out.* New York: Walker and Co. (Candid comments about growing up gifted from gifted students in the United States.)

Erlich, V. (1982) *Gifted Children: A Guide for Parents and Teachers.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall. (Practical suggestions.)

Featherstone, Bonnie D. & Reilly, Jill M. (1990) *College Comes Sooner Than You Think!* Columbus, OH: Ohio Psychology Publishing Company. (Easy to follow, step by step college planing guide written for students and their parents to use together.)

Galbraith, Judy. (1984) *The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide (For Ages 10 and Under.)* Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Co. (Written for gifted kids, viewpoints of children, coping techniques.) Also from the same publisher *The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide (For Ages 11-18)* and its sequel, *The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide II.*

Kerr, Barbara. (1985) *Smart Girls, Gifted Women.* Columbus, OH: Ohio Psychology Publishing Co. (Understanding and guidance of/for gifted females; includes brief biographies of eminent women.)

Lewis, David. (1981) *How to Be a Gifted Parent.* New York: Norton. (For preschool.)

Perino, Sheila and Joseph. *Parenting the Gifted: Developing the Promise.* New York: R.R. Bowker Co. (Characteristics and supportive strategies.)

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Takacs, Carol A. (1986). *Enjoy Your Gifted Child.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. (Insight into giftedness as it applies to parents and adults who have contact with the gifted child.)

Vail, Patricia L. *The World of the Gifted Child.* New York: Walker and Co. (Parenting anecdotes and activities.)

Warren, Sandra. (1991). *The Parents' Guide to Teachers of the Gifted/The Teachers' Guide to Parents of the Gifted.* Monroe, NY: Trillium Press. (A uniquely designed double-fronted book to help dispel myths and misunderstandings between parents and teachers of the gifted student.)

Webb, J., Meckstroth, E., & Tolan, S., (1982) *Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers.* Columbus, OH: Ohio Psychology Publishing Company. (Focuses on psychological aspects of gifted—a must for anyone concerned with gifted youth.)

This article is based on a similar aticle in the CAG Parent Handbook, *a publication which is available from the CAG office for $3.00 per copy plus tax and postage ($4.00 will cover it all.) Jo Anne Viserta-Galinis lives in Huntington Beach. She is the past Orange Region Parent Representative to the CAG Board.*

Parent Round Table

Some parents from the Garden Grove USD Parent Advisory Committee discussed what it's like to be parents of gifted children.

Communicator: As parents of gifted children, what do you think is the most important thing you can do for them?

Terry: Parents have a responsibility to keep them stimulated. Any child who's going to live up to his potential in life needs to be stimulated by just general good parenting.

Paul: It's taking the child's abilities and helping to mold and shape them along the lines of their desires and interests, not what we as parents think they ought to want. They need the freedom to grow and to blossom according to their gifts and abilities.

Oy: Provide them with a lot of experiences, vacations, plays, science fairs. I have a really hard time realizing just how young they are. My son is bright, so I thought he was capable of so much, too much, and I made a lot of demands on him that didn't fit his maturity level.

Terry: Is there any difference between parenting a gifted child and parenting a regular child?

Cindy: I worry about their not living up to their potential. I want them to do something with these gifts that they have. We also face the underachiever syndrome, and that's been a challenge for me lately.

Communicator: How are you handling that?

Cindy: We're trying to identify his strengths away from his older brother's (who's also gifted) strengths and let him become his own person. He has a new puppy, and he's reading about it and it's his project. Like you said, Paul, finding their interests.

Communicator: If you say to him, why didn't you get a better grade, do a better job, what does he say?

Cindy: "I didn't have to. She said this was enough."

Oy: It seems that 5th grade is when all of a sudden the kids get lazy or something. School is so easy for my son, but I think that sooner or later it's going to get more challenging, and then he won't be doing as well as he should. I'm kind of concerned about that.

Paul: I'm thinking about what Cindy said about that balance between not pushing them too far but making sure that they're not an underachiever. It's hard to know at what point I'm expecting more than I should. I have to keep reminding myself that he's only seven. I can't expect him to come up with a new theory of relativity yet! Even in second grade I see the attitude that I think has permeated our society that there's something about hard work that isn't fun. If it's fun, it has to be easy. I want to encourage him to know hard work can be fun.

Communicator: As parents of gifted children, do you find that you can reason with your children and work with them on discipline this way?

Terry: Yes, it seems to me that my children and the other children they play with do have a better ability to understand the reasons for actions and behaviors. If you can present it logically, they'll grasp it. They don't necessarily like it, but they can understand.

Mary: That ties in with what Oy said about not treating them as children. We talk out a lot of things and try to reason, but sometimes I think we tend to not come down to their level.

Paul: To me it is imperative that they understand reasons so they don't view parents as a totalitarian dictatorship.

Oy: Sometimes I look at my son and I think, gosh, he's so bright but he just doesn't have any common sense. He can get the more important things in life, but things like hanging up the towel...

Communicator: What about the child who can read books far above his grade level—the second grader who can read sixth grade books—but whose emotional level is still second grade. Is that a problem?

Terry: I'd try to remember that this is a seven-year-old and not expect more than they are ready for.

Cindy: When my child was in fourth grade, all the kids started reading *Alien* and books like that. I don't like to read those kind of books, but I found that I needed to know what he was reading: not take the books away from him but work with him in understanding them.

Terry: Our kids don't have any problems telling us, "I can read these words but I don't really understand this and I'm not enjoying it." They like to read *Archie* comics. I have to be careful not to smother that!

Mary: If they're not ready for the material, it just bypasses them. If they're reading the newspaper and they're not ready for what's there, they may read the words but it just doesn't go in.

Communicator: Do you let them go to the library and pick out anything they want to read?

All: Yes, oh yes.

Terry: If you want children to be lovers of reading and the library, you keep taking them to the library and it becomes part of their lifestyle. They don't know any better. They just choose the library.

Communicator: Have your children all been in GATE programs from a very early age.

(All indicated first or second grade. Mary and Paul have each homeschooled their children for a period of time. They both said it was a wonderful experience and that their children were able to move ahead rapidly in this situation.)

Terry: Any classroom is a trade-off, since you are dealing with thirty-some different personalities. If any teacher could take one student aside for several hours a day as in a homeschooling situation, nothing but good could come from that. Homeschooling isn't always practical and it isn't the world we live in either.

Mary: It was the enrichment that was so important about homeschooling. You could just dig and dig and dig.

Terry: We don't believe in accelerating a child. We believe in allowing a child to go to his level and enriching everything possible.

Communicator: Do you think the special day class for GATE is a good way to go?

Oy: Oh, it's a definite advantage.

Paul: It's the only way to do it right. They're challenged, not bored.

Cindy: We've made sure our kids are involved in other activities outside of GATE: sports, music, things where they were mixing with other children.

Paul: Most GATE teachers spend time talking to the kids about their role in life. You know, you don't want to develop a nerd, and that's what everybody was concerned about when we first began. The teachers help them understand the real world they live in. Our children do understand that not everyone sees things the way they see them. They have a lot of ability to let other people be themselves.

Cindy: It really is our obligation to see that these children do understand themselves and understand what their obligation is. I'm so happy that they're doing something with the junior high GATE kids. When our older son went to junior high, he was mixed with all the kids and all the teachers. It was a different world. We were struggling with trying to explain to him that he came from a program where his needs were met, but now it wasn't going to be the same. It was difficult. High school is great. He's had excellent AP classes.

Thanks to Mary and Terry Horowitz, Oy Yamamoto, Cindy Ortega, and Paul Payne.

Gifted Kids Don't Come With a Set of Instructions

by Fran Westbrook

I became interested in gifted education for five reasons. Their names are Jeff and Randy, Jane, Michael and Meredith. Jeff and Randy are my two sons. Jane, Michael and Meredith were three students that I had when I was teaching in West Virginia. I taught 4th grade and that year I only had 14 kids, but three of them had IQ's of over 150. I really was unprepared to deal with them. We had learning centers and extra activities, but I wasn't really challenging them.

It was Jane, especially, who made me aware of how different these children are. She was extremely bright—the best at everything. She was in a theater group that did plays for children. She played the part of Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* and all of her actions and reactions were just perfect. She became the subject of a case study I did for a class I was taking. She told me all of the things she wanted to be. She was going to go to law school, and she was excited about having her own apartment. On the side she was going to study entomology. (I had to go look it up, because I wasn't sure if it was the study of words or bugs, but I knew it was something I didn't know anything about.) She had her whole life planned out, but I when asked her what was so exciting about having her own apartment, she said, "Cause then I won't have to eat my Mom's spinach." She was still only nine years old. So remember they're children first and gifted second. A lot of the problems they have are the same problems that other kids have, but because of their heightened intensity and awareness, the problems can become a more difficult.

The Gifted Label

It's very important to remember that you may have several children, and they're not at all alike even though they may all be gifted. One might be gifted in an academic area, maybe in a very specific academic area—perhaps math or reading. Another might be gifted in many different academic areas. A third might be very talented and creative in the arts.

Gifted is a label that you can't really keep a secret. Some people don't want to talk about their child as being gifted, but the kids know it. They know when they're 4 or 5 that there's something different about them. They look at things differently, they think differently, and this needs to be acknowledged. I think it's important to talk about it, and what it actually means. It's also important that they understand other children's gifts, that not everybody sees everything just as they do. It's important that they realize that there are traits other than intelligence that are important, such as love, loyalty, generosity, patience and understanding. Being brighter doesn't guarantee that they're going to be happier or healthier, more socially adept or successful. It also doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to be hyper, difficult, overly sensitive, or neurotic nerds.

It's important that these children have friends who are like they are. If you have to go out and import them, if you have to drive several miles to get a kid that's at the same intellectual level that yours is, I think it's very important that these children have playmates who are similar in interests and abilities. It's also important that they spend time with true peers in the school setting.

The gifted label may cause problems socially for the parents. You are not going to become most popular parent on the block because you have a gifted child. Parents of more average children have no sympathy for any problems which you may face as the parent of an extremely intelligent child. Finding a support group of other families with gifted children is frequently as helpful for the parent as it is for the child.

I'm reminded of a story that Dr. Barbara Clark tells of a student who came to her named Rocky. The reason that the parents brought Rocky to a special summer school for gifted children, was because Rocky was not talking. Rocky didn't talk at all. They had taken him to doctors, they had taken him every place to see what was wrong, because he had just completely shut down. The parents didn't know if it was neurological or psychological, or if he had something physically wrong with him. She agreed to take Rocky. After several days in the class—which always started with a warm-up

This article is excerpted from a presentation at the CAG Conference in San Jose, March, 1993. Fran Westbrook is a GATE Resource Teacher for Redwood CSD. Her address is 2696 Miller Avenue, # 4, Mountain View, CA 94040.

session in the morning where they would throw out some kind of challenging question or a quotation—suddenly Rocky's hand went up. She immediately called on him, and he gave an off the wall answer, really bizarre. But nobody laughed and they all discussed it. Several days later she saw Rocky walking down the hall just happy as a lark. He had been talking and participating, and he had his arm around a new student. "Aw, you're going to like it here. This is a great place." School had become safe for him. What happened to Rocky was that he had a teacher who had just been fed up with his bizarre answers and his constant talking, and she told him to shut up. That was it. She didn't ever want to hear him again, and he literally shut down, just completely quit talking.

Permission to Fail

We need to let gifted kids know that it's okay to fail. I'm not talking about making straight F's on a report card, but they get a lot of pressure, both external and internal, to be successful. Maybe students need to "fail" at something in elementary school, not get an A on a project or not win the spelling bee or the science fair. It's important to let children know that they don't have to be perfect in everything. Many gifted students drop out of college because it is the first time in their lives some of them have ever known any kind of competition. They've always been in the bluebird group.

It is important to give these students praise, not just for what they do but for the kids that they are. If they only hear praise for all of their accomplishments, that's what they think they are. I'm a good grade. I'm a perfect paper, but maybe I'm not okay myself. One of the problems I have with a lot of my students, is getting them to take a risk. They won't try something because they're afraid of not being perfect at it. They need your acceptance for who they are. And I tell you, this is not always easy. My older son is now 32 years old, and he should have been an adult in the 60's instead of being born in the 60's because he was a hippie. Long hair was not in style when he was in high school, but his hair looked like Wolfman Jack. He was wearing ripped up jeans when it wasn't in style. He wore Army boots to school. He was just kind of a rebel. He had a backpack before any other kids ever heard of backpacks. In addition to that, his grandmother had given him a long red scarf and he wore that. We're in the middle of July, and he has a long red scarf tied around his neck. It was hard to walk down the street unobtrusively with this kid who was 6 feet tall with a big voice. I was trying to walk along and hope that maybe people wouldn't realize I was with him. I had to take a look at that and admit, yes, this is my son and I love him.

Home Environment

Your home can be a stimulating experience for your child. You're the one who is with him most of the time. You can take him to the library, you can provide him with books, you can share the theater, recreation, travel, experiments and all the things you can do at home. You can be a source for this child and provide the things he's going to need. Home must be a place where knowledge is valued. If you don't value knowledge, if you don't like to read, then your child isn't going to either. Home should be a place that will nourish these capabilities. It's important that home is safe and has a good atmosphere for learning.

When your child does show good judgment, let him know. Sometimes we get into the habit of pointing out only things that they do wrong. It's important that children know when they've made a wise decision, because they form their sense of self only in the reaction that they get from other people. This doesn't mean that you never bawl them out, that you don't have to discipline, but the message must be clear—"I don't like what you did" not "I don't like you."

Mark Evans solved this problem in our family. My younger son is very creative. He never liked to do anything the same way twice. One day when he was about four, I was in the kitchen and I saw him waving out the window, talking and waving. So I walked over to see who he was talking to and there wasn't anyone there. Right then, Mark Evans came to live with us. Mark Evans climbed all over his dad's car, Mark Evans got into all kinds of trouble. We even had a friend whose first question when he came to our house was, "What did Mark Evans do today?" This went on for years. He never forgot where Mark Evans lived, where his grandfather lived, that his uncle was Bob Evans, you know, farm sausage guy, and we knew the cemetery where his great grandfather was buried, after he'd been in a war, and how his father made money. He was the sheriff. I said I didn't think sheriffs made that much money. "Oh, yes they do, you know, when they capture the bad guys and they get all the money." So Mark Evans went on a trip to France one time on that money that his Dad got. Mark Evans got blamed

for everything, so Mark Evans had to go home.

Listen to your child. Pay attention to what he is really saying. I saw a child and a father in a bookstore one time. The kid was trying to get the father's attention and the father was busy looking at his own books. And I thought, this father's going to wonder some years down the road why the boy doesn't come to him anymore to talk.

Their questions can be difficult. If you don't know the answer, tell them you don't know. Send them to the source. I have told my class many times I really don't know the answers, and they have a lot more respect for me because I can admit that to them.

Teaching Responsibility

These children need responsibility. They need to make some decisions for themselves and live with the consequences. You may see that their idea might not be the greatest, but they have to learn that on their own and live with it. They can manage their own money. They're going to make mistakes but that is part of the process. If you're going on a trip, let them plan part of the trip. Let them be the map reader or the note taker, or make the budget, or keep the list of the groceries if you're going camping.

They can also argue very persuasively about why they shouldn't be doing something. Since there are certain requirements that you have to have around the house, there are some rules that you have to live by. Sometimes you really need to stick to your guns. Tell them, "I'll think about that and I'll get back to you tomorrow." That will give you a chance to think. They need rules but they must be realistic ones. I have only four rules in my classroom. We discussed them the other day, since I was having a problem. We discussed the rationale for each rule. The students decided there were good reasons for each of the rules, and therefore they were pretty easy to follow. You can be democratic with your gifted child and explain to him what the reason is, and most of the time he will understand that and will go along with you.

Gifted children are often able to complete tasks very quickly and very easily, and this also tends to make them very sloppy. This can lead to poor study habits. You might want to try the ABC's of Homework. A is "all by myself." Let the kids do the homework by themselves. You don't have to be the teacher. B is "back off." Only go in to help them if they really get stuck. C is "call it quits" at a reasonable time. They still need their sleep and there are certain times when it's time to quit studying.

You may find yourself dealing with the word "boring." One of the things I tell parents is that kids figure out very quickly in life that if they say something is boring they can often get out of it. Boring can mean a lot of things. It might really be boring.. I've been in a lot of classrooms in my lifetime and there are some that are just plain boring. But boring can also mean "I don't want to put that much effort into it since it's not my main interest. I'd really rather be doing this."

Day dreaming is important. Children need time to think. You can't be creative on a time schedule. If the kids don't ever have any time to lie on the bed and just look at the ceiling and do nothing, how can we expect them to be creative? I'm reminded of a story that I heard about a teacher. She was looking back at her student and he wasn't doing what he was supposed to be doing. She asked him, "Johnny, what are you doing?" He said, "Well, I'm just sitting here thinking." And she said "Well, stop thinking and start reading."

The Specialist and the Generalist

Many gifted children like to specialize. Don't be upset by that. You might have to live all year with dinosaurs. You might have to have a dinosaur bedspread, all the books in the library on dinosaurs and models of dinosaurs every place you look. If it doesn't pertain to dinosaurs, they don't want to read it, they don't want to see it, they don't want to hear about it. But this can change overnight, so don't get upset because it might be Star Wars next year or something else.

The flip side of that coin is that some children have so many interests that their rooms are incredibly cluttered. Even their minds seem cluttered. They can be interested in 10 or 20 things at the same time. I had a little boy a couple of years ago, a third grader named Danny. We'd been studying about monsters and he was supposed to be writing his story about the monster he had created. Danny always did have a hard time sitting still. I understood this and let him move around a lot. On this day he would sit at his desk and write a little bit, then he would run over to the corner where another little boy was sitting. Then he would come back to the desk, and then he would run back to the corner. I was ready to go over and try to get him on task, thinking he's got to write this story and it's important that he finish this project. Then I realized what he was doing. He was playing

chess—and winning—over there at the corner table, and he was writing a story over here at his desk. When I read his story, it was one of the best in the class.

He was playing chess

—and winning—

over there at the corner table,

and he was writing a story

over here at his desk.

Appreciate their work. As I said earlier, don't always be a teacher. You don't have to say, "Well, this is a nice picture but wouldn't it have looked nicer if you had made the clouds a little bit bigger, made the sky a little bit bluer." You don't have to constantly analyze what they're doing. And if you don't know which side of the picture is up, ask them to hang it on the refrigerator. Criticism and unduly high expectations often kill creativity, so curb your desire to criticize. That doesn't mean you have to accept anything just because they've done it. Sometimes there are things that are really just too sloppy and not done well.

Help them handle disappointment. They're going to have a lot of ideas that other kids don't accept, and they need to learn that everyone isn't going to appreciate what they do.

Very early in life gifted children have a highly developed sense of justice which often leads to unrealistic goals for reform. They have an advanced level of moral judgment. They worry about what's going on in the world. They have religious concerns. They're humanistic. They have a very difficult time coping with discrepancies and hypocrisies. My son now lives in Delaware and every time there's a march on Washington, I watch for him, because whether it's saving the whales, protecting women's rights or whatever, he's usually there protesting. But he did learn early that there is an appropriate way that he can make a difference.

Underachievement

One of the very special problems of gifted children is underachievement. Some gifted children fail to achieve because they are perfectionists, and they think, "If I can't do it perfectly, I'm not going to do it all." Sometimes underachievement is the result of a desire for social comfort, a sense of belonging. Sometimes they have a desire to pursue specific interests, and so they only want to do what they like to do, letting everything else go. There may be a developmental delay or some kind of learning disability in gifted children.

Sometimes you have an angry child whose parents only love him when he is achieving. In some cases the father never gives approval to the child. Nothing is ever good enough for him, in the child's eyes. An over-enhancing mother may try to make up for that and help the child all the time, bailing him out when he's in trouble, helping with homework so he won't get any farther behind. This gives a double message to the child, "My father thinks I'm not good enough and it must be true because my mom has to sit here and help me with everything."

Instead, take away some of the pressures, give more positive evaluations, avoid sarcasm, be patient, avoid nagging and bribery. Don't reinforce bad concepts by saying, "You never finish anything." Don't reinforce the gap between potential and performance by saying, "Well, you're in GATE, why don't you do such and such?" Don't allow a child to apply damaging labels to himself. Be positive and try to help your child develop self-confidence.

Advocacy

There is a time to be a pushy parent. I know sometimes parents hang back and say, "I don't want to appear pushy, but I've got this other child that's coming along who's never been tested." Go talk to somebody. You can refer your child yourself. I had a little boy the other day come to my class who had referred himself. While he was in being tested for a learning disability, he told the psychologist, "You know, I really think I ought to be going to the GATE class. The child's verbal score was astronomical, probably one of the highest that I have. He does have a learning disability—a severe learning disability—but he is also very gifted.

Parents can make a difference. Go to the school board meetings to find out what they're doing. Write to your legislators, talk to your legislators. If it weren't for parents, the gifted program would have sunsetted years ago.

Above all, always remember you are the most important people in this child's life. Enjoy it, because of all the labels, gifted is certainly the best. To contribute to the world is a challenge that we all have. To contribute greatness is an opportunity that only the gifted child has.

Mentoring: It's Not Just for Our Children!

by Sue Benzinger

Parents are an important and very necessary part of a healthy school atmosphere for GATE students. We can be involved as volunteers at the classroom level, but even beyond that, we need to be able to promote, protect and help build the GATE programs that our children benefit from. As parents, we should realize that now, more than ever, our presence needs to be felt at school. Mid-spring is the time when school budgets are formulated, and it behooves us to be aware of this process and participate in it, since so much of the program policy which affects our children is driven by dollar considerations. This is a time of reduced school budgets, dwindling resources and staff cutbacks. Questions of local control and site-based management, as well as issues of categorical funding reform, may affect GATE programs. Protecting the GATE program in our school district and at our school site is imperative, and there is no one more powerful and able to do this than parents of the GATE children.

Sue Benzinger is the Redwood Region Parent Representative on the CAG Board. Her address is 4673 Kneeland Road, Kneeland, CA 95549.

While that is all well and good to say, becoming a seasoned advocate for GATE may be difficult. Educators, like so many others, have a special (and sometimes baffling) vocabulary to describe their work, and a parent who is relatively new to participation in her local school may well feel that she is having to learn a foreign language just to know what's going on. The special process of school budgeting and finance can also be confusing to someone who has not been a part of this before. Becoming an activist for your child's education may seem a daunting task.

A big job, yes, but not impossible. Here's where you can use a mentor, someone who is experienced and knowledgeable and can help you become an effective participant. First of all, get to know the people at your school. Introduce yourself to your child's classroom teacher and let her know that you are an interested parent. Ask questions. Learn how the system works. Get to know other GATE parents, work with them, share ideas and information. If this is your first experience with the GATE program, talk to parents who have older children who have been in the program for a while. They can often share much valuable experience. Become part of the local GATE parent/teacher association, if there is one in your area. Contact your regional representatives for CAG and get to know them. Meet the GATE coordinator for your school district and find out all you can about the legislation which affects GATE programs.

With all this input, parents can become active and positive participants for GATE. They can attend committee or school board meetings when decisions are made which may affect GATE programs. Parents are a welcome addition to any school decision-making group, and as parents you have a very powerful voice. USE IT! Get to know your school board members. They will welcome and appreciate someone who is informed and can speak succinctly on a topic. Cultivate these links, because this is an investment over time. Be persistent. Fix your eyes on a goal and remember that our job is to help the school fit the education to our children.

Shades

Blue shades the color of a crystal-clear sky.
Blue is the sob fleeing from my sorrowful eye.

Lavender enhances the starry twilight hour.
Lavender enfolds the beautiful flower.

Scarlet is the rose, cut with a long stem.
Scarlet is the blood, surging from a lost limb.

Cherie Jolly
Allen School, Garden Grove USD

Being the Parent of a Gifted Child

by Vera Eby

"School life should grow gradually out of the home life... It should take up and continue the activities with which the child is already familiar in the home."
John Dewey

What should home activities be and which qualities should parents of the young gifted child strive to nurture? I would like to suggest that appropriate activities are those that encourage curiosity, exploration, risk-taking, and most important of all, love of learning.

Reading. It's been said by many others, but it can't be emphasized enough: reading aloud to a child should begin as early as possible and parents should read to the child **every** day. It is my experience that all children love to be read to. When I read to my younger son, my other son, who was five and a half years older, loved to join us, and eventually he too liked reading out loud to his brother. I periodically read to my high school students, even the ones in honors classes who are generally good readers.

Many gifted children are early readers, starting well before kindergarten. With these children, select three types of reading experiences: books they can read themselves, books you can read aloud to them (*Winnie the Pooh* was a favorite of my sons), and books you can read aloud together, taking turns. Be sure your reading is interactive, asking questions as you go along. Who is _____? Why did he do _____? What would you have done if _____?

We parents have to remember that we are important early role models for our children, and if we want children who will be readers, we must be readers. It is as important that your children see you reading daily, for pleasure and for enrichment, as it is for you to read to them.

Writing. At the earliest age a child should begin to write, even before he or she *can* write. Encourage your child to make up a story and to draw the pictures, illustrating the story. Have him/her tell you the story so you can write down the words. Keep it simple. Then read the story back to your child and to other members of the family. When my older son was about four or five years old, he "wrote" a series of stories about a Martian. He continued writing, and by the time he was in fifth grade he had written many stories and plays, but he always enjoyed looking back at those first efforts and chuckling at his own "baby" experiences at writing.

There are some wonderful activity books available that encourage children to create characters and stories. A favorite my sons enjoyed was one in which they each created a monster. We were in Hawaii, but in our house there is always "homework," even in the summer on a trip to Hawaii. At ages eleven and six my boys loved monsters, so I selected this as our "homework" topic. Every morning my older boy drew and wrote about his monster, following page by page instructions to fill in details about the monster's life and personality. The younger son did the drawings, dictated to me, and I wrote the words. They had a great time! The younger one in particular was convinced that "homework" was "fun-work," and isn't that an attitude we would like our children to have?

Workbooks that will encourage creative writing can be found in teachers' exchanges and at conferences like the CAG conference where publishers display their wares. One book I have seen which looks like fun is *Create a Character*, which is published by Autonomous Learning Publications and Specialists in Colorado.

Enrichment Activities. There are varied activities that we parents can do with our children: provide puzzles, mazes, and other mind benders, games to build thinking skills, trips to museums, aquariums, and historical sites, or math and science projects. The Usborne books, available in many bookstores, are a wonderful collection of books which offer information and activities on topics as diverse as architecture and reading-puzzle adventures. Their book of *Science Experiments* is filled with easy at-home science activities.

Most important of all, share your loves and interests with your children. Let them see your enthusiasm for old movies, American history, Claude Monet, or woodworking. Let them join with you and perhaps develop the same interests. Take them on trips. We spent two summers on the East Coast where we visited battlefields, museums and buildings of historical interest. We saw Gettysburg, Old Ironsides, the Smithsonian and the Old North Church. We even did genealogical research at the National Archives. My sons had a wonderful time and developed a love of history.

Above all, enjoy your children. All too soon they will be grown.

Local Parents "Piggy-Back" on CAG Student Grant Program to Meet the Needs of District Gifted Students

Melinda Johnson, Parliamentarian
Parents and Advocates for Gifted Education, Ventura Unified School District

After years of existence as a lobbying group, spending most of our energy trying to convince legislators and local boards to continue to fund GATE programs, PAGE (Parents and Advocates for Gifted Education) decided to do something proactive instead of reactive. Our over-worked teachers, with their huge class sizes, do not have much time to encourage the truly individual efforts of their GATE students. We, as parents of gifted students, know that can produce wonderful works.

We were aware of the CAG Student Grant Program, in which GATE students throughout the state are encouraged to submit applications for grants up to $500.00 for special projects or instructional opportunities. We thought this was a wonderful idea, but we knew from the past that only two students in all of California receive these grants each year. The chances that one of our local students would win such a grant were rather small.

We decided to "piggy-back" on CAG's student grant idea and apply it to the local level. We agreed that our grants would be much smaller but we would offer them to a larger number of students. Our hope was that they would provide the encouragement needed by gifted youngsters in our community to explore and develop ideas beyond the scope of their GATE classes.

PAGE budgeted $450.00 for 9 grants of $50.00 each and solicited applications from elementary, middle and high school students. We asked the students to tell us what project they would like to do, set forth a budget to accomplish the project, explain what they expected to achieve from the experience and how they would share this with their fellow GATE students. To be on the safe side, our application blank has a place for the parent to guarantee that he or she approves the project and will support the child's efforts, and for the GATE or Honors/AP teacher to approve the concept.

Coordination with the head of the GATE program is essential. Flyers go to the students in their classrooms and announcements are made in the GATE newsletter. We all know where those flyers often wind up and announcements often are overlooked in the newsletters. So our GATE coordinator emphasized in all her sessions with GATE teachers that they should encourage participation by their students.

One person must be in charge of all aspects of the process so that nothing slips between the cracks—from the receipt of the applications, circulation to the judges, grant decisions, receipt and acknowledgement of the final product. However, everyone can participate in "talking up" the program and seeing that it gets adequate exposure through the press and in the schools.

The first year we received only a small number of applications, and only a few of them were really well thought out. They were also from younger students, mainly 4th and 5th graders. But the second year we received more and better applications, including a group of high school students who wished to pool their grant monies and make a video on poetry appreciation.

After receiving the applications, we circulated them to three judges who awarded points based on creativity, feasibility and benefit to other GATE students. We asked a college administrator, a mental health professional (both were also parents of gifted children) and a GATE administrator from a neighboring district to be our first three judges. The judges' comments, point count and recommendations were returned to our Board of Directors, who made the final decision regarding each grant. Our judges were gracious enough to make lengthy comments and allow us to pass them on to the applicants, whether awarded a grant or not.

When we received the finished products, we did everything possible to display them to the largest audience we could. One photographic album of local architecture received widespread press coverage, and we are sure, resulted in increased applications for us the next year. We displayed the works of the students at School Board meetings and at individual schools' Parents Nights, or in their libraries. The students were acknowledged in our newsletter. In short, there was a lot of positive reinforcement.

After two seasons we have original cartoon books, bilingual books, sign language demonstrations, videos, and maps with many other exciting presentations planned. Because of the press coverage of the architectural portfolio, we have had offers of increased funding from private business. Because our timing is now set, this year's finished products will be presented to GATE students in the fall, just before the 1993-94 applications are distributed. The success of this program has been heartening to us as parents and to GATE teachers, who know it takes extra effort to help these students realize their potential. The whole process of taking something from a rough concept to a finished product is so satisfying and uplifting that the program sells itself after the first year.

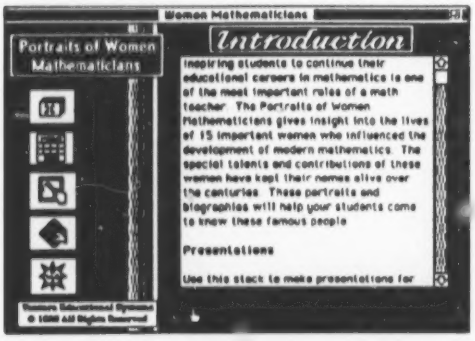
Application and judging forms, sample acceptance and denial letters are available for anyone who is interested. (All denial letters contain suggestions for improving the application the next time.) For further information call or write to us at PAGE , P.O. Box 6028, Ventura CA 93006-6028 or call our District GATE Specialist, Margaret Gosfield at 805/641-5000.

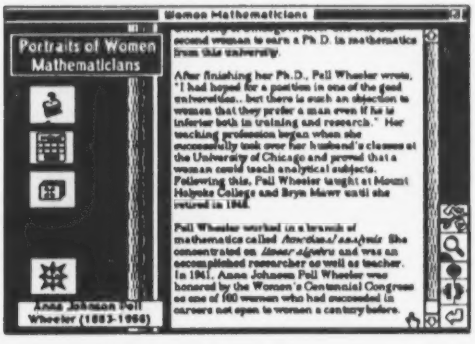
TECHNET

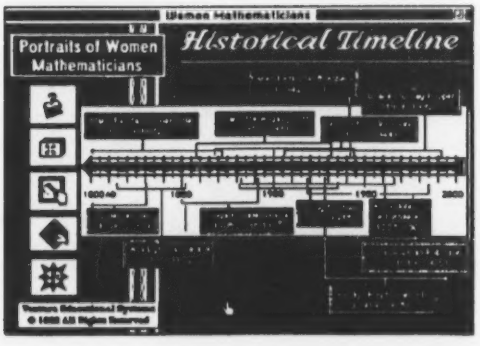
Terrie Gray, Editor

In the April TechNet, I listed some criteria for evaluating curriculum and gave instructions for creating HyperCard stacks. I do not believe that every teacher needs to author instructional materials, since there exists a wealth of excellent resources. This month I will review one commercial software package that is appropriate for use with gifted students.

- It encourages elaborate, complex, and in-depth investigation of information.
- It integrates language arts, social studies, and math.
- Its format supports self-directed learning and creativity.


Women Mathematicians
Portraits of Women Mathematicians
Introduction
Inspiring students to continue their educational careers in mathematics is one of the most important roles of a math teacher. The Portraits of Women Mathematicians gives insight into the lives of 15 important women who influenced the development of modern mathematics. The special talents and contributions of these women have kept their names alive over the centuries. These portraits and biographies will help your students come to know these famous people
Presentations
Use this stack to make presentations for





Title: *Portraits for Classroom Bulletin Boards: Women Mathematicians*
Author: Susan and John Edeen and Virginia Stachmann
Publisher: Dale Seymour Publications
Distributor: Ventura Educational Systems
System requirements: Mac Plus or higher
Format: HyperCard 2.0

This program, which carries a retail price of only $29.95, includes one disk and a 35-page booklet. It features 15 prominent women mathematicians from 370 A. D. to the present. The layout of the booklet is very simple: the struggles and achievements of each mathematician are described in a full-page biographical sketch which is accompanied by a full-page blackline portrait. The stories of these women are inspiring—students will see not only that each had to overcome significant obstacles, but also that many achieved career success while nuturing their children and giving humanitarian social service. The introduction to the booklet suggests that the sketches and portraits can be used not only for bulletin boards, but also as starting points for research or writing ideas.

The first card (screen of information) of the HyperCard stack states an objective for this program: to "[Inspire] students to continue their educational careers in math..." The stack is an excellent example of the inherent interactivity of HyperCard. In the biographical sketches (somewhat more detailed than in the booklet) students can click on unfamiliar terms and go directly to the glossary. They can click on a button to see a global and country map of the mathematician's origin. Information is accessible in a variety of ways: by clicking on a name by its point on a time line, by clicking on a name in the index, or by clicking on a title on the directory card.

The layout of the stack is clear. Navigational buttons make browsing through the stack a simple task. One button even simplifies the copying of a portrait to the student's own presentation or report.

The activities section contains two games, one a crossword puzzle, the other a hidden-picture portrait identification game. They are primarily for entertainment value—higher-level thinking would occur in creating presentations, or assimilating data for a research report.

I am pleased with the *Women Mathematicians* program and feel it is a good resource for our students who need honorable role models. In the Fall Ventura Educational Systems will introduce *Women Artists, Women Writers,* and *Women Scientists.* Judging from the quality of the current program, we have a variety of excellent resources coming.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TECHNETTWO

DNA Sleuth

by Casey Dunn and Terrie Gray

Casey is a sophomore from Twain Harte who has served on the SAGE Leadership Team for two years. Since he was one of the recipients of this year's CAG student grants, it seemed fitting to ask him to describe his work. And, since it is an example of how technology can be put to work, I'll proudly include it as part of the TechNet column. The following combines his essay with additional comments from a telephone interview.

Congratulations, Casey—we're ALL proud of you!

With the birth of the biotech industry has come a flurry of interest in genetics and microbiology. Many are intrigued with the actual science and the social issues that come with it. An excellent example was presented by Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*. Because of commercial interest, science is progressing at an amazing speed. As new procedures are developed and fast-paced discoveries are made, the old procedures become extremely refined and simplified, even so far as to allow them to be done by interested people in their own homes. (With a little determination, anything's possible.)

Having seen all the headlines in the news and remembering some contacts I made at a conference, I became one of those people.

The first experiments I performed were relatively easy, basically mixing things, but they are becoming increasingly difficult. My recent experiments involved recombining plasmids (loops of DNA), cloning antibiotic resistant genes, and PCR (polymerase chain reaction.)

At this point I am doing some higher level cloning procedures for isolation of certain mouse genes—by placing them at random in E. coli bacteria and then detecting them after they have been replicated by the E. coli. (Don't worry—I'm not in danger of infection—the E. coli's ancestors were resident in the human body but have since been engineered so that they can only survive in laboratory conditions.) The cells that contain the desired gene are then lysed (split open) and the gene extracted. The gene then can be analyzed further. I find these projects exciting. The easiest way to crack the code of life is through decoding DNA. I hope to be able to do that and plan to make this work my career.

I am also attempting to use computers in conjunction with the microbiology procedures. Once the sequence of the DNA is determined, it can be conveniently analyzed and decoded through computers. This unique combination of technology provides many interesting challenges.

However, this can be a very expensive hobby. Enzymes commonly cost $50 for one microliter—a millionth of a liter. A microcentrifuge (an extremely high speed centrifuge necessary in many procedures) is impossible to find for less than $1000. The field would be practically impossible for the novice to pursue if it weren't for generous people who are willing to lend a helping hand or the grants for students provided by conscientious corporations. [Ed. note: Last year Casey's primary work was refining and improving "Aerogel," an ultra light substance-also known as "frozen smoke"—which has potential for aerospace and household applications because it is a good insulator. For this work, Casey won not only a 1992 CAG student grant, but also substantial awards presented to him in Chicago and in Washington, D. C. Casey tells me he continues his work on Aerogels in addition to the work he has described in this article.]

Fortunately my parents have always been supportive of my ventures. My father has a background in math and science and was able to help me with my projects. My mom has let me use 1/4 of the freezer, her best tupperware, and a whole room for my projects. I appreciate their commitment to helping me and also appreciate the scholarships I've received from CAG. Thanks for helping me fulfill my dream!

NRC G/T

Self-Concept and the Gifted Child

Executive Summary

by Robert D. Hoge and Joseph S. Renzulli

The work reported herein was supported under the Javits Act Program (Grant No. R206R00001) as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The findings do not reflect the position of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement or the U.S. Department of Education.

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Copies of the full report are available for $10.00 from the Dissemination Coordinator, The University of Connecticut NRC/GT, 362 Fairfield Road, U-7 Storrs, Connecticut 06269-2007 Ask for order # 9104.

Objectives

Three general issues are addressed in this monograph. First, do gifted and average children differ in their self-concepts? Second, what, if any, are the effects on self-concept of labeling a child as gifted or exceptional? Third, does placing the child in a separate enriched or accelerated classroom have any impact on self-concept?

Examinations of Self-Concept and Giftedness Constructs

The monograph begins with discussions of self-concept and giftedness constructs; we show that there is less than perfect agreement on the way in which they should be defined and measured.

For example, while there is something of a consensus that self-concept refers in very general terms to the image we hold of ourselves, there is considerable disagreement over the precise way in which self-concept should be defined. The major issues concern the way various components of self-concept should be conceptualized and with the way the specific components combine to form a composite construct. The absence of an agreement on the treatment of self-concept is shown to complicate analyses of the relation between giftedness and self-concept.

Complications also exist with respect to the measurement of self-concept. In part, the difficulty arises from disagreements over definition. Different conceptualizations of self-concept imply different measurement tools. This situation creates difficulties in assessing the construct validity of self-concept measures. There also exist problems with the reliability and criterion-related validity of some of self-concept measures. Progress is being made in the refinement of the instruments, an encouraging development from the point of view of establishing a better understanding of the giftedness/self-concept relation.

Problems associated with the definition and measurement of the giftedness construct are also discussed. Alternative conceptualizations of giftedness exist. These are shown to vary along five dimensions: (a) breadth of the construct; (b) the content of the definition; (c) the level of exceptionality represented in the definition; (d) whether the definition represents a static or dynamic focus, and (e) the precision of the definition. It should be understood that this variability considerably complicates analyses of the relation between giftedness and self-concept. For example, a definition based narrowly on IQ test performance may have very different implications for a child's self-esteem than one based on a broad range of academic aptitudes and achievement levels.

Issues relating to the measurement of giftedness are also discussed. Several points are developed. Considerable variability exists across applied and research settings in the type of measure employed and in the way in which the same measure is sometimes used. Second, a discrepancy often exists between formal or official definitions of giftedness and the operational definition actually employed in a selection situation. Third, problems exist with respect to the reliability of some of the measures, and, in particular, with their construct and criterion-related validity. These problems are also shown to complicate investigations of the links between giftedness and self-esteem.

The Relation Between Giftedness and Self-Concept

Theoretical considerations. A set of hypotheses regarding the link between giftedness and self-concept are developed from various sources.

There are two bases for hypothesizing more positive self-concepts on the part of gifted children. The first rests on the assumption that, to the extent that performance is higher in the gifted, higher self-concepts will ensue. The second consideration derives from the assumption that the act of labeling a child as gifted will contribute positively to their self-esteem.

On the other hand, some reasons exist for hypothesizing that self-esteem in the gifted might be more negative than in less gifted peers. First, under some circumstances, it is likely that the high expectations communicated to the

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gifted child will be translated into failure experiences. The child never quite measures up to the expectations and self-esteem suffers. Second, many exceptional children are cognitively advanced and may be more sensitive to social cues and more analytic about them. This may, under some circumstances, incline children toward a more critical attitude of their abilities and performances. A third basis for predicting lowered self-esteem relates to the social comparison process. We would expect this process to be involved in those cases where children are identified as gifted, removed from the regular classroom, and placed into homogeneous groups of gifted or exceptional children. This might lead to decreased feelings of self-esteem since the child is now exposed to heightened competition.

The research evidence. Four sets of published studies relevant to the hypotheses are reviewed. These involve (a) direct comparisons of gifted and nongifted students; (b) studies exploring moderator variables; (c) studies of the labeling process; and (d) studies of program effects.

The first type of study entails direct comparisons of gifted and nongifted students in terms of self-concept. The 18 studies within this category employed one of three designs. In the first design, children identified as gifted and placed in special classes were compared with more average students in regular classes. The second design involved contrasting children identified as gifted on the basis of standardized test scores with students not meeting the criteria of giftedness. In this case, there are no labelling or special education elements involved. In the third design, the self-esteem scores of students identified as gifted and in special programs were compared with normative scores reported in connection with the self-concept measure employed in the study.

Overall, the results of these studies indicated higher general self-concept scores for the gifted children compared with their nongifted counterparts. Further, two of the three studies focusing on academic self-concept showed higher levels of self-esteem in that area for the gifted pupils. Finally, no evidence exists that social self-esteem is lower in gifted children than more average children; in fact, the single study showing a difference favored the gifted group.

There are, on the other hand, some qualifications developed with respect to these conclusions. These qualifications have to do with the high level of variability in the results of the studies and with certain methodological weaknesses in the research.

The second set of studies focused on moderator variables; that is, variables that might mediate the relation between giftedness and self-concept. Some research is available for the following variables: gender, level of exceptionality, and level of achievement. Unfortunately, only a small number of studies show variable results, but no firm conclusions were reached regarding the operation of moderators.

The third issue concerned the effects of the labeling process on self-concept. Unfortunately, we found no studies dealing directly with the effects of the gifted label on the child. There is, however, research showing that the labeling of a child as gifted does have a definite impact on the expectations and attitudes held by parents and teachers, and one would expect that this would eventually impact on the child's self-esteem.

The fourth set of studies explored the effects of programming on the self-concept of gifted pupils. Two types of studies are relevant here. The first involved a comparison of gifted children in enrichment programs with gifted children not in special programs, or, alternatively, gifted children in different types of programs. The second examined changes in self-concepts of students before and after entrance to such programs. These studies are potentially useful in providing information about the effects of exposure to special programming on self-esteem. In particular, they provide information regarding the impact of the social comparison process.

Ten studies on program effect are reviewed and are shown to reveal highly variable effects. Thus, in some cases exposing the gifted child to special programming seems to have no effect on self-concept, in other cases it leads to enhanced self-esteem, and in still other cases it has a negative impact. Unfortunately, the design of the studies is not such that one can determine the conditions under which positive, negative, or no effects are obtained.

Conclusions and Guidelines

The following conclusions and guidelines have emerged from a review of the research evidence linking self-concept and gifted constructs. Each conclusion or guideline is followed by a brief discussion of the research-supported rationale.

Conclusion One: The direct comparisons of gifted and nongifted students revealed that the gifted students as a group showed no major deficits in self-esteem.

Discussion: The majority of students seemed to indicate somewhat higher levels of general and academic self-esteem for the exceptional group. These conclusions are, however, qualified by a number of considerations, including: (a) the variable results yielded by the studies; (b) methodological flaws in many of the studies; and (c) a lack of attention to moderator and interacting variables.

Conclusion Two: Some indirect evidence exists that labeling a child gifted would have a positive impact on self-esteem, but direct evidence is lacking.

Discussion: The impact of labeling a child gifted is an important issue, but one that has been virtually ignored in the research literature.

Conclusion Three: There is some support for a social comparison type of process; that is, that moving a child from a regular classroom to a homogeneous, highly gifted group will have a negative impact on self-concept.

Discussion: Research regarding the impact of gifted programming on self-esteem has yielded variable results. The evidence was, however, by no means consistent, and this body of research sometimes displays methodological flaws.

Implications for Research

Many problems exist in this area of research on self-concept and the gifted child. Yet, important issues are being addressed, and some exciting challenges exist with respect to research opportunities. The research methodology in the areas of self-concept and gifted is improving. It is important, however, to build further strength in this area, and we will offer some guidelines.

Guideline One: It is imperative that future researchers pay more careful attention to their treatment of self-concept and giftedness variables.

Discussion: Considerable progress has been made in the development of some of the measures, particularly the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 1982, 1985), the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers, 1984), and the Self-Description Questionnaire (Marsh, 1988; Marsh & O'Neill, 1984). Researchers are advised to use one of these standardized instruments and to score them for specific domain scores, as well as general self-esteem.

Guideline Two: There is a need for more attention to the definition and measurement of the giftedness construct (Hoge, 1988, 1989; Hoge & Cudmore, 1986; Renzulli, 1978, 1986).

Researchers must be explicit about the definition of giftedness they are employing. There is certainly room for variable types of definitions, but it is imperative that the construct being employed in the study be made explicit and related clearly to the purpose of the research. In addition, the actual selection devices employed should be assessed in terms of their psychometric properties and should be explicitly related to the giftedness construct being measured.

Guideline Three: Future research must attend more closely to experimental design.

Discussion: A major problem with much of the research being reported is that it confounds critical variables. For example, as we have seen, much of the research on program effects confounds three processes: (a) the effects of labeling the child gifted; (b) the effects on the social comparison process of placing the child in a homogeneous group; and (c) the impact of the placement on actual achievement levels.

There are, to be sure, practical and ethical limits to the type of research that can be conducted in this area. For example designs employing random assignment of children to enriched and non-enriched classrooms are probably unacceptable. Still, we are going to have to be more ingenious in our choice of designs and analytic tools if we hope to make real progress in sorting out these issues. We note, as well, that there is room in this process for more qualitative research methodologies.

Guideline Four: There is a need for longitudinal studies in which changes in the relation between giftedness and self-concept can be explored at different age levels.

There are clearly developmental processes at work here (cf. Feldman & Benjamin, 1986), and these should be attended to more closely in research efforts in our field.

Some Implications for Counseling

The results of research reviewed above revealed no drastic problem areas for the gifted group as a whole. In general, their levels of self-esteem appeared no more problematic than those of more average students. This does not mean, however, that attention should not be paid to the special needs of this group. Several considerations lead to this point. First, the

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majority of the results reviewed in this paper were based on group data. These can be somewhat deceptive, often concealing problems revealed in individual cases. Second, and as we emphasized, the research is limited in some respects and, hence, not a perfect guide to practice. Third, there is ample evidence from clinical sources that exceptional children may be especially vulnerable to certain types of social and emotional problems (cf. McMillan & Loveland, 1984; Schneider, 1987).

Guideline Five: Counseling with gifted and talented students should have a developmental focus.

Discussion: Zaffrann and Colangelo (1979) have presented a useful general model for thinking about the counseling of gifted students. They believe that "counseling with gifted and talented students should take place within a developmental program organized and maintained for these youngsters...A developmental guidance program for gifted and talented youth must be based on the unique needs and concerns of these students" (Zaffrann & Colangelo, 1979, p. 168).

This type of advice is especially relevant when considering the issue of self-esteem. Our earlier discussion indicates that the nature of self-esteem and the processes affecting it change over the childhood and adolescent years. In developing intervention programs it is important to take account of these developmental changes.

Guideline Six: Exceptional children often have especial needs with respect to emotional health and social competence, and that systematic efforts should be made to accommodate these needs.

Discussion: Zaffrann and Colangelo (1979) acknowledge that exceptional children often have special needs with respect to emotional health and social competence, and that systematic efforts be made to accommodate these needs.

Summary Statement

Three broad objectives were represented in this paper. First, we were concerned with explicating the various questions raised regarding the link between giftedness and self-concept. Many discussions of this issue, as well as many of the research activities in the area, are guided by simplistic conceptualizations, and we have endeavored to introduce some conceptual clarity.

Second, we have made an effort to synthesize the research results available on the issues raised. Unfortunately, that synthesis did not yield a great deal in the way of conclusive answers to our questions. Research methodologies were highly variable and, in some cases, flawed, and results tended to be inconsistent. Yet, the review helped to create a foundation upon which to build a sounder body of research.

Finally, specific recommendations for future research and for the counselling of gifted children are offered. The research recommendations focus on the need for (a) more adequate treatments of self-concept and giftedness variables; (b) improved design and analytic procedures; and (c) attention to moderator and interacting variables. The counseling recommendations focus generally on the need for an increased sensitivity to the effects of the gifted label and gifted programming on the self-concept of children.

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junior high school, that child is going to fall into a crack and disappear forever. They begin to be afraid that they're always going to be alone, that they're not going to have any friends, not going to be with any group. They start to feel isolated. They don't have a clear identity.

They must re-prioritize their time and how they use their talents, because now they're beginning to be in charge. They have to figure out how to do things on their own because they're not wanting to ask mom and dad for help.

Not only are they confused adolescents, they're confused about the meaning of giftedness. They say, "nobody ever told us what giftedness is, what that means," but they know they're different. During elementary school they did pretty well. They didn't have to study a lot. Things came pretty easily. Homework went quickly. They may have feelings of inadequacy as they enter the middle school years and things become more difficult for them. They may not have developed the work habits they need to survive in middle school, so they start feeling, "I'm not gifted anymore."

What are some of the needs of the gifted middle school student? First, they need opportunities to develop independence, opportunities that you need to structure for them, with some safeguards, so they're not totally out on their own. They need some concrete experiences for self-direction.

They need some models to emulate. They need to see people besides their parents. I've found with my children, that this was a time where someone else in the extended family or a neighbor or a teacher, became much more important to them than mom and dad. I encouraged that. I encouraged them to spend time with this mentor, whom they have suddenly discovered knows more than mom and dad.

They have a desire to be taken seriously. When they come up with something which they think very seriously about and you see it as funny, it can create some real problems.

They want some predictable physical and temporal space in which to be alone, to have time to be on their own.

A problem may arise when a child comes from an accelerated elementary GATE program, such as self-contained classes, where they've really moved ahead and they have perhaps touched on 7th grade curriculum—they may have learned algebra, heaven forbid, during 6th grade! Often, middle schools are not able to accommodate this, and difficulties arise.

The child has ceased to be a child. I have saved a cartoon which shows dad and daughter. Some interesting discussion going on. The father looks at her and says, "How do you expect me to parent if you won't child?" This situation usually arises during middle school—you're trying to be the parent and your child is not playing the role properly.

So what do we parents do? We preach. We say, "You should have done this," "It's your responsibility to..." We say these things. An example, "It's your responsibility to remember to take your homework, not mine." What happens to the child? He knows he should have remembered it, but because you're preaching instead of helping him solve the problem, he feels there's a lack of trust.

We probe. We say, "Why did you do that?" And the child's reaction may be to become anxious, withdrawn, or start giving us back half truths because they don't want to be criticized.

We pacify. We say, "Oh cheer up. It can't be that bad." The child comes in totally crushed by something that happened at school and you say it's not so bad. The child feels misunderstood, angry and confused, because to the adolescent it *is* that bad, it really is *that bad*.

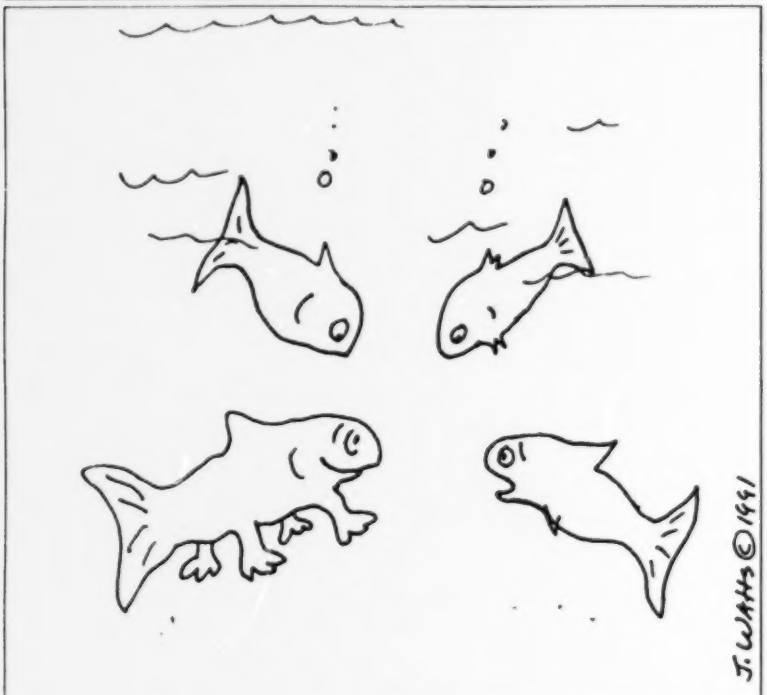
We analyze. We say, "What's wrong with you? You're just tired, you don't really mean that." And when we say these things, we stop the communication. The child thinks, "Why should I try to talk to her? All she tells me is I'm just tired. She doesn't understand what I'm trying to tell her."

So what's to be done? As parents, there are some specific things you can do, and I have some strategies that will help. You need to act as a leader. You still need to set the limits, but you need to negotiate the limits and the responsibilities. One of the things that's always worked well for me is family meetings. It's very simple. You set a 20-minute time slot on a weekly basis when you know everyone can be there. It's not to be missed. Twenty minutes only. You keep an agenda on the refrigerator and everyone can put something on the agenda.

It's a time where you and the child interact as equals, everything has value, everyone can say something and everyone has equal negotiation responsibilities. It's not a time for you to preach, it's not a time for you to announce what you're going to do. It's a time to look at the agenda and say, "Okay, there's a problem here. You put it on the agenda, Mary, tell me more about it." And as a family you negotiate a consequence or a solution.

ON THE LIGHT SIDE

by Jean Watts



Look, be realistic. You graduated last in the whole school.
If none of us have made it up on shore, how will you manage?

This works really, really well with gifted kids. They like to know they will be listened to. They like to know they can be given credibility and can be given some trust and responsibility in solving problems The first couple of times you do it you may not get too much on the agenda, and the kids won't say much. But if it continues on a weekly basis, and you show that you do respect their concerns and their suggestions, it will become one of the best communication tools in your family.

Another thing they need is time alone. Lots of times when kids go in their rooms and stay alone, parents get worried, but gifted kids need this time alone. They need time to be with their music, to be with art. They just need time to think. They like space. There may be concern that they're becoming depressed or withdrawn, but gifted kids do need time alone. It's as if they have to put their house in order. They might even want a lock on their door. We went through that at our house. We discussed it at a family meeting and decided that they had the right to have a lock on their door. There were times when they needed their privacy.

They need to be provided with diverse experiences. It's very important to make these kids self-reliant. When it came to the point where everybody needed a ride somewhere and nobody was driving yet, I spent a lot of hours chauffeuring. I decided a good way to encourage self-reliance was for them to use the public transportation system, in perhaps 6th or 7th grade. Their use of public transportation was one of the things that really helped me to teach my children that they could be in charge. They could get somewhere on their own and get back. It's been one of the best things I did, because when they went off to college, they didn't have cars and they had to know how to get around. I set it up very carefully. If they were going to visit someone in the family on the other side of town, I made sure it was the time of day when there wouldn't be a lot of people and a lot of confusion, like right at 5 o'clock rush hour. I made sure they had money and a phone number so if they did get lost or missed the bus, they didn't get stuck. It worked very well for us.

Another important thing is giving them a chance to do something outside school besides the usual kinds of things kids do—music lessons and sports. Gifted kids frequently need to have a different experience. My son started taking college classes in music at age 12 because the level of music that he needed was not available in his middle school and high school. He received concurrent enrollment credit on his transcript which assisted him to fulfill his graduation requirements quite early More and more colleges are offering Saturday programs and summer programs in the areas of science and math because they have the facilities. They have the labs. They're encouraging girls.

I recommend an excellent book called *Guiding the Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Youth, A Practical Guide*, by James Delisle. He has six suggestions for parents. Number one is to remember that the real basics go beyond reading, writing and arithmetic. Delisle reminds parents that sometimes it's more important to play in the sand, smell the flowers or talk to other people than to worry about reading, writing and arithmetic. His second rule is that you can be good at something you don't enjoy doing. Number three, it's all right to be good at things that are unpopular with your friends. The kids need to remember that, especially when they're starting to develop deep interests in middle school, because they may not be the

kinds of things that a lot of the other kids are doing. Number four is that life is not a race to see who can get to the end the fastest. We're not going to say, "Finish algebra in three weeks just because you're gifted." That isn't what life is all about. Fifth, you have the ability to ask questions that don't have answers. Gifted kids love to discuss and philosophize and talk about 'what ifs.' "What do you think this ought to be and how do you feel about that?" They need an opportunity to do that. Sometimes as busy parents we might think, "Oh, this is a waste of time. I really would like to get on to something else." Indulge your children with the chance to ask questions that don't have answers. Hopefully they'll find some answers for those questions later on, some questions we need answers for in our society. The last one of Delisle's six realities is that it's never too late to be what you might have been. Research shows that some gifted kids tend to pick what they want to be very early and they don't deviate. But others change their majors in college six or seven times. Either way, it's never too late.

If you feel like you really can't communicate, you're getting really frustrated and you see your child getting quieter and more withdrawn, try writing a letter. Stick it under the door, put it with the laundry, put it in the lunch bag (if you still pack lunches), or mail it with a stamp even though they still live in your house. It's a letter from you to them, and say, "please send me an answer." Wait for them to answer you. It sounds silly but it works. The written word is sometimes more powerful than anything you can say.

So how do you help adolescents with all of their anxieties, feelings, growing pains and the urge to be independent? You need to listen and be a sounding board for your children. You need to encourage them to communicate with you, whether you have to do it in writing or orally. You need to sit down and go eyeball to eyeball with them. Don't say 'tell me about your day' while you're cooking dinner. Go sit down somewhere and say, "How did it go today, what happened?" Really pay attention to their answers.

Be specific when you answer them. Sometimes they'll ask you a question, and if you're busy, you'll say, "Oh, I don't know about that. Let's talk about it later." That's a real turn-off. Have structured discussions through the family meeting approach. Sometimes you might try a role reversal, letting the children play parents at the family meeting. Let them run the meeting and you be the child and see how it goes. They'll feel very powerful. Involve your younger children too, so you'll have the communication already working when your next child reaches middle school.

Most importantly, practice. Don't just try once, fail and say, "It didn't work, we won't do it." Practice the communication. Practice the family meetings. Parenting a middle school gifted child can be an exciting adventure.

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Gray

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in her room to keep her from finding pianos elsewhere, for they felt it was a sin for a little girl to have such a passion for mastering the instrument. Although this child had the determination to sneak out her window and escape to the local church where she could practice the organ at night, she was not able to persevere against her parents' will indefinitely. She was ultimately unable to give expression to her gift, and at more than 50 years of age, still suffered the pain of unfulfillment.

This is an extreme example, for these parents exerted a negative, rather than a neutral force on the child and her gift. What effects would a positive force have? In a 1962 study of 100 young concert pianists, Olympic swimmers, tennis players, and research mathematicians, Benjamin S. Bloom identified several conditions which stand apart from the native gifts and appear crucial to producing excellence. Not only did the research subjects demonstrate enormous potential, but their parents demonstrated extraordinary powers to support their children. They valued their child's gift, and viewed activities in the area of talent as a natural part of life. Very often, the parents were engaged in the activity as well, so the child was able to learn its "language" at an early age. The parents valued the work ethic and transmitted this value to their children, who learned self-discipline. Finally, the parents were willing to devote family resources to gain access to a variety of teachers. (M. Pines, "What Produces Great Skills?")

Parents are ideally placed to fulfill the child's basic needs. If we refer to Maslow's well-known pyramidal hierarchy of human needs, we see that most elemental are the physiological needs, then the need for safety and security, followed by a need for belonging, acceptance and love. Acceptance of our children's gifts enables them; denial disables them. Once an

individual is accepted and loved, he or she can develop a sense of worth and competence, and is freed to realize his or her potential.

What are some needs that may be unique to gifted individuals? Leta Hollingworth described a number of difficulties very highly gifted children may experience in her 1942 text *Children above 180 IQ (p. 145).* Although few of our children measure at this IQ range, they may share many of these challenges.

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Difficulties for the Very Highly Gifted

1. They may experience frustration by conceptualizing moral and ethical problems before they can "solve" them. [I saw this happen when my fourth child, then 5 years old, decided to become a vegetarian because he discovered animals were being killed solely to provide him food. His classmates ridiculed him when he told them that he was helping out the animals hurt by the Exxon Oil spill by refusing to eat the cafeteria's hot dogs. He did not know how to respond to their jeers—especially when they told him cows and pigs weren't hurt in the oil spill.]
2. Gifted children may learn to manipulate adults or lose respect for those who seem less intelligent than they. [I almost hesitate to tell this story: My oldest son and a pair of friends discerned a pattern in the behavior of their least favorite teacher. He would show a movie and then read to them from a library book. This approach was so predictable, and so dull, that after a movie introducing one unit, the boys went to the school library and checked out ALL the copies of the featured book, thus undermining the teacher. He was not fond of them either, and instead of appreciating their inventiveness, remarked that they needed a "kick in the seat of the pants." Obviously a real challenge is finding appropriate and understanding teachers.]
3. The child may have a tendency to argue about what's required; he or she may have difficulty listening to others, or restraining self-expression; he or she may put off routine "drudgery" in order to engage in more stimulating and rewarding projects.
4. The child's versatility and widespread interests can pose a problem if habits of sustained effort and self-discipline are not developed, because projects are engaged in only through the initial excitement period and abandoned when something new catches his or her interest.
5. The characteristic of being capable of self-determination and tending to cherish a sense of control can be a problem. [I call this the "I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it" syndrome.]

Parenting Pointers

If it is a parent's job to build a child's self-concept, by loving and accepting him "warts and all," and the gifted child is sometimes so difficult, how can we do it?

1. Listen to the child's concerns. Help him or her think through ethical problems. Try to find ways he or she CAN have a positive influence and impact.
2. Set an example of showing respect for others, regardless of their apparent IQ. Teach that all people have worth.
3. Model active listening techniques.
4. Help them schedule their lives and learn to establish goals and priorities.
5. Provide opportunities to make choices so the child learns how to handle responsibility. Break chores into small steps which seem more manageable. Be flexible. If the child has a good idea, try it.

Joanne Whitmore, author of *Giftedness, Conflict and Underachievement*, wrote that "Good mental health unquestionably is a prerequisite for self-actualization..." (p. 138.) She lists several factors common to gifted children which make them emotionally vulnerable. They have a tendency toward perfectionism, a trait that can motivate to great achievement or hamper progress. Parents can address this quality in their children and help provide opportunities for children to achieve success in low-risk activities such as crafts, cooking, and non-competitive sports—anything that is fun and "worthwhile." I remember asking my two oldest boys if they wanted to play on a soccer team. They both declined, with my second son saying, "You know me; I'm just not into athletics." I encouraged them to participate and made a bargain with them; if they didn't like soccer after one season, I wouldn't ask them to play again. Perhaps this took some risk out of the opportunity; at least I didn't say they had to become league champions! Ultimately both boys played soccer—and enjoyed it—for more than three seasons.

Another facet of the perfectionism gem is shown when a child who is talented in one or two areas expects or is expected to excel in all academic areas. We need to help the child, and

the teacher, understand that development may not take an even course. Some teachers are very destructive in their comments: "How could you have only gotten 3 right on the spelling test? I thought you were gifted!" A friend of mine called to tell me her son was hiding under the bed before school: he had forgotten his homework and knew the teacher would hate him. My daughter, in the same class, expressed her stress in bad dreams and stomach aches. We resolved this crisis by enlisting the help of the Special Education teacher, a loving, nurturing individual, who volunteered to tutor my daughter after school on spelling and math. This teacher recognized that my daughter learned best in a warm environment and in a kinesthetic mode. Now, three years later, this same daughter is excelling in math and envisions a career in medicine.

Sometimes gifted individuals experience social isolation. Paradoxically, our society values conformity, but also innovation. Anyone very different from the average is made to feel uncomfortable. It is as though success by one person diminished the self-worth of another. One woman remarked to me at a church gathering, "Oh you talented people! You can do everything. All I can do is scrub pots and pans." In instances like this, the visibly talented individual is made to feel responsible for what is perceived to be a lack of talents in the other person. Peers are not the only ones who may feel uncomfortable around persons of talent; authority figures also generate "You are different from me" messages that exclude rather than include the targeted individual. These realities justify the existence of a peer group, where the child (or the adult) is accepted, acknowledged, and appreciated.

Certainly there is more to success than self-esteem. What else would the "Owner's Manual" have us as parents do? Foremost would be the charge to get to know each child as an individual and to be aware of his or her particular strengths. Then, build on those strengths. It is important to remember that talent can't be created; the purveyors of "superbaby" method books seem to overlook this point. Parents shouldn't push their children into activities. They can invite and encourage, but they must be responsive to the children's motivation and drive to pursue an interest. Parents are responsible for initially exposing the child to a variety of opportunities, and for responding to the first signs of talent.

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Part of providing a supportive environment is locating appropriate teachers for the gifted. If the child is enrolled in public school, the parent should be involved in school groups, and participate in parent organizations for the gifted. Dr. Feldman observed that teachers were a central part of each child's development. (p. 124) He felt that "more important than being a top-level performer in his or her own right, the teacher should be kind, enthusiastic, encouraging, positive and patient." (p. 145)

Joanne Whitmore lists several characteristics teachers of the gifted should embody. [Perhaps it would be appropriate for parents to establish goals to make these qualities theirs, too.] A teacher who is fully-qualified to teach the gifted is a life-long learner, has superior mental abilities, is a divergent thinker and creative problem solver, is well-educated in the liberal arts, is understanding and empathetic, well-organized, possesses excellent communication skills and enjoys a healthy self-concept. (p. 400) The successful teacher uses a basic approach of motivating achievement through an exciting and rewarding curriculum that also provides for the emotional and social needs of the children.

There are no easy answers to the question of how to raise capable, creative children who will happily make effective use of their talents and skills. Ultimately, we have to rely on loving them, accepting them, providing opportunities, being flexible, and responding to their needs.

For Further Reading

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